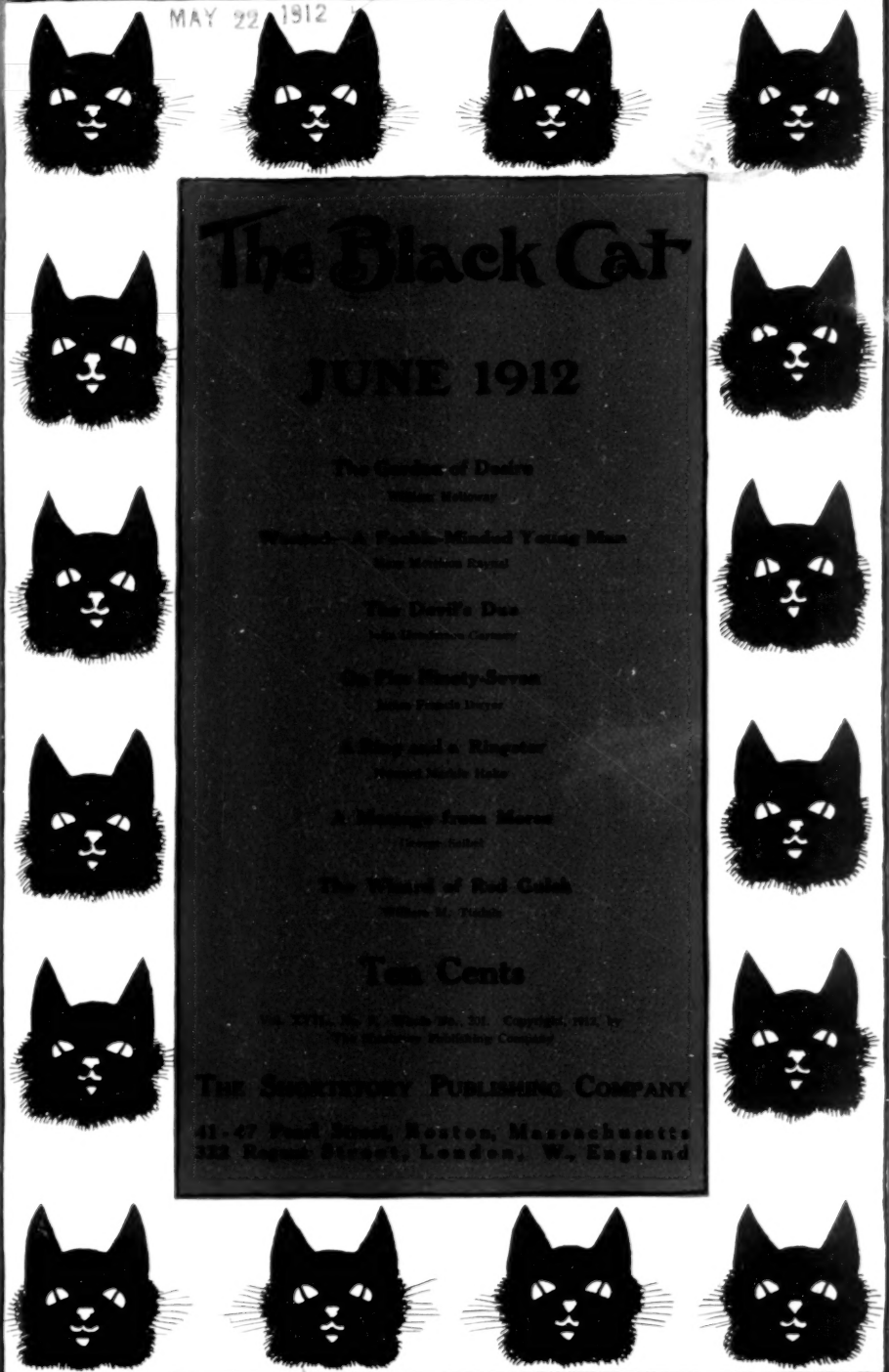
MAY 22 1912



The Black Cat

JUNE 1912

The Garden of Desire

Wisdom — A Feeble-Minded Young Man

The Devil's Due

Six Five Ninety-Seven

A Ring and a Ringster

A Message from Mars

The Wizard of Red Gulch

Ten Cents

Vol. XVIII., No. 9, Whole No. 213. Copyright, 1912, by The Stratford Publishing Company

THE STRATFORD PUBLISHING COMPANY

41-47 Pearl Street, Boston, Massachusetts
322 Regent Street, London, W., England

SAPOLIO

is doubly valuable in springtime. It adds an extra arm to cleaning and doubles your power against dirt. The brightest women have found it the one cleaner that Works Without Waste.

Cleans—Scours—Polishes

©CLB255183

The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

Published at 41-47 Pearl Street, Boston, Mass.

Copyright, 1912, by The Shortstory Publishing Co. All rights reserved.

Vol. XVII., No. 9.
Whole No., 201.

JUNE, 1912

10 cents a copy
$1.00 a year

Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

THE BLACK CAT is devoted to original, unusual, fascinating stories — every number is complete in itself. It publishes no serials, translations, borrowings, or stealings. It pays nothing for the name or reputation of a writer, but the highest price on record for *stories that are stories*, and it pays not according to length, but according to strength. To receive attention, manuscripts must be sent flat, fully prepaid, and accompanied by addressed and stamped envelope for return. All MSS. are received and returned at their writers' risk.

CAUTION.—*The entire contents of* THE BLACK CAT *are protected by copyright, and publishers everywhere are cautioned against reproducing any of the matter, either wholly or in part.*

The Garden of Desire.*

BY WILLIAM HOLLOWAY.

IT was in the long bazaars of Peshawar, where Afghan and Briton meet, that Andrews came upon Robert Winthrop, seated on the ground, mumbling prayers in one of the uncouth dialects of the hills. He was dressed in the long yellow robe of a Buddhist priest, and his face, which Andrews had not seen since their college days five years before, was sunken and weather-beaten past all recognition.

Andrews, indeed, gave the yellow-clad figure barely a passing glance, so immersed was he in the wonderful life of the bazaars, where, in a medley of strange colors, Afghans and Pathans, fierce Rajputs and hard-bitten men of the hills, gossipped, bartered, gambled together, their dark eyes flashing like so many stars.

A light touch upon his arms startled him. "How are you, Andrews?" asked a voice he vaguely recalled.

He swung sharply about. Peshawar is too near the Kyber Pass and the Afghan frontier for a man to welcome casual handling.

The Buddhist priest was looking up at him, his sunken grey eyes alive with a curious inward fire. "How are you, Andrews?" he repeated.

This time Andrews understood. Winthrop's eyes would have betrayed him anywhere. He stood staring at the emaciated figure

* Copyright, 1912, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain: All rights reserved.

in the yellow gown. "Bobby Winthrop!" he ejaculated. And, standing in the roadway, he swore softly.

Robert Winthrop gave a little smile. "You must give me some money, you duffer," he whispered. "People are looking."

Andrews tossed him several small coins, which the other received with a gutteral blessing in an indescribable native tongue. Then he rose slowly to his feet, a tall figure from which every particle of superfluous flesh seemed to have been removed by long privations that had made his inward energy shine out more indomitably than ever. "I've got it, old man," he said, simply.

The two had not met for five years, but had it been fifty, Andrews would not have been in doubt. He and Winthrop had discussed the matter so often, it had been so much a part of their life together, that he would have understood a reference to the Garden of Desire, had he suddenly encountered Winthrop at the South Pole.

"You've got it?" he repeated, half-stunned with surprise. "Say, doesn't that beat the Dutch?"

Winthrop smiled. "I only reached the end of my calculations a month ago," he explained. "Then I sent a duplicate set of my figures to New York—I didn't want to take any chances you see, of America losing the credit if I went under—and set about organizing my expedition. We are over here a mile or two outside the town. And we start to-morrow morning."

Andrews drew a long breath. He alone of his college generation had believed in Winthrop, and lapse of years had never dimmed his faith. "I'm ready," he said with a little laugh, feeling as though he had suddenly become a vital part of the Arabian nights. "Of course, I must say good-bye to my friends here first."

Winthrop nodded. "Wasn't it lucky I was here this morning? I had an errand at the bazaar, and of course I had to play my part. Funny rig, isn't it?"

"Why not chuck it?" asked his friend.

This time Winthrop grew very serious. "I couldn't do it, old man, if I wanted to ever so much. No man but a priest could ever get access to the hidden temples. And I had to get inside them. Now," he smiled faintly—"well, now it wouldn't be exactly safe for me to chuck it just at this stage of the game."

Towards them in the clear morning air marched a tall artillery officer. "There comes my host now," said Andrews quickly. "I want you two chaps to meet."

"Oh, I know Neville," said Winthrop hastily. "He feels sure I am crazy." An odd smile crossed his face. "I'll expect you out

after tiffin. And don't let Neville draw you out about our expedition. Call it a hunting trip."

And, with a quick nod, he drew his yellow gown about him and walked slowly away.

Colonel Neville joined his guest, looking rather awkward. "I don't mean to be inquisitive," he began, "but do you happen to know anything about the man you have been talking to?"

Andrews explained that his friendship with Winthrop had been more than ordinarily close, and had been interrupted only when the latter had cut himself off from all home ties to bury himself in the mysterious East.

Colonel Neville listened closely. "Was he crazy when you knew him in America? Had he strange ideas? Did he want to find out a happy garden? Or something like that? Where our original ancestors lived? Sort of Garden of Eden?"

"He had strange theories," Andrews admitted. "And I recall that some people thought him a little queer. But as a matter of fact,"—he hesitated for an instant, uncertain how far Winthrop would like him to go—"as a matter of fact, Neville, he converted me to most of his theories."

The Englishman looked puzzled. "He is a wonderful chap in many ways," he agreed, "knows more Sanscrit and native dialects than any man out here. But he is crazy without a doubt. My idea is that he loosened a screw grubbing round in those filthy native temples without anything to eat. He fights shy of me because I want him to let the station physician look him over. Says I lack imagination."

Andrews smiled. "That's what Bobby always told me," he explained. "I am going to ask you to let me go off with him after tiffin," he went on. "It's an old promise—a hunting trip. And when we get back I intend to bring you two together."

"Thank you," said Colonel Neville dryly. "But you needn't worry. You won't get back. That is, not if I am any judge. He has a lot of hillmen there I wouldn't trust with the change of an anna. And, according to all reports, they expect to go right into the mountains where no white man has ever set his foot. Take my advice, Andrews, and cut it out. You are too good a man to waste."

This time Andrews laughed outright. It was his first visit to the East, and its glamour and mystery had not yet begun to haunt him as they finally do haunt all who come within their reach. "Nonsense, old man," he answered with assurance. "I'm looking forward to the time of my life."

The feeling was still upon him next morning, when in the grey dawn the little expedition broke camp for its strange journey. He watched the pack-mules, that carried their bedding and provisions and the wild-haired, half-clad, half-savage hillmen, that attended them, with a strange feeling of elation. It is not given to everyone to form part of the most extraordinary expedition since Time began.

Winthrop and he rode side by side, when the road permitted, the chief of the hillmen in the lead. The morning was very still and the air cold. To the west the mighty mountains that border the Afghan land lifted their tawny shoulders into air. Andrews surveyed them with eager interest.

"Are we going that way, Bobby?" he asked of his companion.

Winthrop shook his head. "Nothing doing that way, or in Kafiristan either," he whispered. "We are going east, right up in the Himalayas. But first we are going up towards the source of the Indus."

Now when a man wishes to enter the Himalayas it is not necessary to travel all the way to Peshawar, which is at their western edge, and as inconveniently situated for such a journey as a place well might be. So it was no wonder that Andrews looked puzzled.

Winthrop laughed. In his yellow robe he would have made a grotesque figure but for his keen emaciated face, and his wonderful grey eyes. "Do I look like a fool, old man?" he asked gaily. "Don't you see Peshawar is at the end of the railroad line. Once we get clear of the railroad we have a chance to get somewhere. Oh, I have it all arranged with the headman there. He is the only one who knows anything about my plans. And of course he doesn't know much."

He clapped his hands smartly and the headman, who was riding in front, his rifle across his knees, dropped back abreast of them. He was a tall, sinewy, dark fellow, with a hawk's nose and eagle eyes.

"The sahib called me," he said with a grave salute.

"Where are we going, Ito?" asked Winthrop, without looking up.

"Hunting for big game, sahib," was the prompt reply.

"And the five hundred rupees that lie waiting in Krishna Lal's strong box, in Peshawar, Ito?" asked Winthrop, facing him with a smile. "Is it for hunting big game that you are to get that?"

The headman saluted again. He bent low in his saddle, as he whispered his answer. "To the highest mountain, and through the desert of the mighty winds, if my lord will." Winthrop nodded his

satisfaction, and the little caravan went on its way to the north, the mules laboring over the stony ground, the hillmen sitting like statues when the road bent downwards, and running like deer alongside their mounts when the ascent grew steep. And thus some days went by.

It was very cold upon the mountain side. Sometimes Andrews, fresh from the plains, found the low temperature almost insupportable. At which Winthrop would chuckle audibly, and offer him the protection of his thin yellow gown. And ever as they mounted higher, and the cold grew more intense, Winthrop's sunken face brightened, until there came a day when they made camp at the entrance to a narrow valley, and it had become positively radiant.

He walked to and fro before the narrow pass that led within, quoting aloud to himself in a majestic tongue, which Andrews recognized as Sanscrit, his long arms keeping time grotesquely to the rhythmic sounds.

"Here now the trip really commences, old man," he said. "The first stage is over, and real hard work begins." He clapped his hands and the headman appeared. "Tell your men, Ito," he ordered quietly, "our road lies through the valley and across the mountains to a place I go to seek. The reward is great for those who go with me."

It was a weird scene as the headman began his speech, for a huge fire had been kindled in the entrance to the pass, and its light, falling on the hillmen's upturned faces made them ghostly, unreal, like figures seen dimly in a dream. As he talked, Ito's keen eyes seemed to dart lightning. He waved his long arms towards the distant mountain peaks, and Andrews knew that he was painting the hardships that lay before them. Then his voice dropped to a scornful monotone as he swung about to the road they had come, and pointed backwards. He gave a little laugh, as though deriding the faint-hearted, then lapsed into silence.

There was a momentary pause, then two of the six hillmen stepped forward. "The dogs wish to go back," said Ito with contempt. "They have the hearts of chickens, and they say that no man may go our road and live."

"To the four that stay, fifty rupees each, on the day we reach Peshawar," said Winthrop. "Let the other two go now and camp by themselves."

That night their little camp was very still. Andrews, try as he might, was unable to shake off a strange feeling of oppression. It

seemed ominous to him that two hillmen, trained in the way of the mountains, should be afraid to go forward. He rolled over in his blanket beside the smouldering fire and found Winthrop's eyes upon him. He kicked the logs into a flame.

"Those fellows seemed rather nervous, Bobby."

Winthrop smiled. "There are all sorts of legends about the road," said he; "legends that have come down from thousands of years. The priests naturally spread them to prevent the people from wanting to go back. And they are just as influential at the present day as ever before. Besides," he went on, "if it were just straight climbing the thing would of course be impossible. Those two beggars couldn't know what I had discovered."

Andrews sat up, sniffing the cool night air. A Californian by birth, he had spent some years in the mountains of Arizona, near the old Apache land, and his training had made his senses more than ordinarily keen. "There's something stirring down below," he whispered.

Winthrop sat up in turn, and both peered down the hillside where the two hillmen had pitched their solitary camp. It was a moonless night, and the starlight cast the earth in deep shadow, through which there seemed to move a shapeless dark figure, sprung from out the night. An instant only the two men sat silent, then to their ears the night wind brought a long yell of terror.

Andrews caught up his rifle and rolled over from the fire. Then he rose cautiously on one knee, to find Winthrop gone. He could see his long figure disappearing down hill. With a bound he set out in pursuit. But by the second camp-fire all was still. The two men who had left the expedition, were lying face upward to the sky, quite dead, a knife-thrust showing just above their hearts.

Winthrop and Andrews stood for a moment motionless in the darkness. Then a twig crackled and an even voice said gently, "Let my lords fear not; it is their servant, Ito." And into the faint circle of the embers stepped the hillmen's chief, wiping his dagger on a tuft of grass.

"I killed the dogs," he said coolly. "They were hired to follow me to the end. Without them it will be harder to win our way to the place my lord wills, and it may be I lose the money waiting for me at Krishna Lal's."

"Oh, hang the money," cried Andrews, hotly.

"Five hundred rupees?" asked Ito gently. "Five hundred rupees told down on the table in Krishna Lal's treasure-room? Surely the sahib is jesting?"

He stuck his dagger into his girdle with the precision of a master workman. "There will be no other deserters," he said in a tone of assurance. And with a military salute he turned about and walked calmly up the hill, as though he were returning from a pleasant stroll.

Andrews looked soberly after him. "A valuable man, but a trifle mercenary," he said thoughtfully. Which afterwards he came to despise as a foolish judgment.

Next morning, the expedition made its way through the narrow pass and entered a winding valley set with trees of a variety they had left behind on lower slopes of the mountains. The air, though cool, had a delicious fragrance, and wild-flowers bloomed on every side. But traces of man there were none.

Ito rode slowly, his keen dark face very sombre and awe-stricken. "Surely, sahibs, this place is accursed of the gods," he said after they had travelled an hour. "Never have I seen anything to match this green solitude." He rubbed his chin with strong, slender fingers. "It gives a man evil thoughts," he ended, with a shiver.

An hour later they halted before a rocky barrier, which stretched itself abruptly across their path, and evidently formed the valley's farther end. Winthrop drew from his pocket a little red-covered note-book, which he examined with some care.

"I made all my calculations here," he explained to his companion. "I sent another little book just like this to New York to be sure that no hitch could occur." He ran his fingers down one of the pages. "The road lies here."

It did, indeed, lie in the direction he pointed; although no one, not warned by someone who knew, would ever have been able to find it, so cleverly had the priests of bygone generations hidden the trail from sight. Even Ito, stolid as he was, looked startled as Winthrop, after a brief search, disclosed the secret way, hidden in the rock.

"Surely devils live here," he muttered in his beard.

The secret trail, once entered on, widened out like a western canyon, with the exception that it was almost totally closed overhead. Despite the cold, the air was heavy with moisture, and thin sheets of ice lined the grey precipices on either hand. After advancing perhaps two hundred yards, the path began to mount at a sharp angle, zigzagging to and fro. Then followed perhaps half a mile of steep ascent, in places almost impassable for the mules, after which the way led suddenly out upon a wind-swept plateau.

In Andrews' dreams that plateau always haunted him. He could see it as it stretched bleakly before him, a dozen miles or more to

the giant mountains that hemmed it in, as it had stretched that June day, when the little expedition crept toilsomely across it. And, like some dreary prison, he could see the deserted monastery where they took refuge for the night.

It was a mighty structure of forgotten ages, standing half-buried in the sand like the ruins of some Egyptian temple. The beating of wind and rain and sand had worn its soft stone structure into quaint hollows; debris from the adjoining cliffs had shattered its rear walls; yet it still fronted the desert with a certain dignity.

It was here that Andrews for the first time began to have doubts of Winthrop—doubts such as he had laughed at Colonel Neville for expressing. He was strolling about the vast empty rooms while daylight lasted; he had entered one, which from the long array of discolored parchments, had evidently been used as a library, when he heard Winthrop's voice raised in anger.

The thing was so totally unexpected that he stood an instant in doubt; then he called his name aloud.

His voice rang through the empty room like a revolver shot; there was an answering shout, and Winthrop appeared from the adjoining room, a parchment in his hand, his face flushed, his whole aspect uncanny; from beneath a fur coat which he had donned on reaching the plateau, his torn yellow gown fluttered grotesquely in the wind.

"Well?" he questioned abruptly. "What's the matter?"

"Thought I heard you yell."

"Can't a man yell if he wants to?" Winthrop's voice was full of anger. He turned about. "I'll be busy for a while, Andrews," he said more quietly. "Just let me alone, please."

That evening, around the camp-fire in the huge stone court-yard, he was himself once more, keeping the little group in good humor with jests in English, and in the native tongue of the hillmen—whatever that might be; after which he spent some time in going over the figures in his mysterious red book.

"Something happened that gave me a little shock, old man," he explained, as they huddled in their blankets for the night.

"Forget it," was Andrews' sleepy answer, but underneath his calmness, his mind was brooding over the strange occurrence of the afternoon. What could have happened in a ruined monastery, that had been deserted for centuries? Was it possible that Neville was right? And that he had come on a foolish quest, from which there was to be no returning?

In the early dawn they gathered for the final stage of the journey.

The mules were turned loose, where there was an opportunity for them to graze on some stunted moss, and each of the seven loaded himself with provisions to the limit of what prudence allowed. Then they set their faces toward the mighty peak up which they must climb.

In the icy atmosphere climbing was very difficult, and, owing to the high altitude which they had already reached, they began to experience difficulty in breathing. But Winthrop seemed to be immune from all suffering. With his eyes shining, his tall slim figure bent forward, he toiled gaily up the declivities, laughing as though intoxicated. Andrews eyed him anxiously. Was it possible, he thought again, that Neville had been right after all?

After two hours, one of the hillmen flung himself down in the shelter of a boulder, and declared it impossible to advance another step; as the man had evidently reached the limit of his endurance, he was left in charge of some provisions, which the others were now compelled to abandon; two hours later another hillman was left behind on a higher level, while the diminished party toiled on.

The sun beat down upon them, scorching hot, and at the same time a bitter wind bit to the marrow of their bones. In the steep ascent hands were torn and bleeding, lips spurted blood, yet up they pressed, until when evening came they made camp almost within reach of their goal.

It was not really a camp, but rather a bare shelter by the side of an over-hanging rock; and here, ere they fell into an uneasy slumber, Winthrop told the story of his dream.

"You know, Andrews," he began, "how I first got on the trail of my theory. We had been talking, you and I, of the original home of the ancestors of the Aryan tribes which peopled Europe, and wondering why none of the migratory tribes ever went back there. Nowadays emigrants often return to their old homes, but in these cases they never seem to have done so, else their literatures would have handed down traces of the return journey. Now why didn't they go back?"

Ito was listening closely. "Maybe, sahib, they couldn't get back," he suggested.

Winthrop smiled. "That's just my theory. Some eruption, or some earthquake may have blotted out the way. It must have been that or the people left behind would have, at intervals, visited the outside world. Now, all races have legends of happy valleys and beautiful gardens, which lie beyond their reach. I concluded that these all referred to the same place, and that the happy valley, some-

where or other, was still in existence. So I set to work to find it. I became a Buddhist priest."

Ito seemed puzzled. "Why should the sahib become a priest?" he asked in a low tone.

"To get inside the old monasteries, where the old manuscripts are kept," Winthrop explained. "My yellow gown took me to ancient monasteries where no white man had ever been, and there I finally found, in a pile of forbidden books, which the priests themselves must not read, directions for reaching the happy valley, which the forbidden books call the Garden of Desire. And now," he ended, with a great sigh of relief, "now in the morning I hope to show you the Garden of Desire beyond that side spur of the mountain."

"The sahib is wonderful," said Ito, softly. "To gain that he has served the gods in the temples. Surely he is a man of marvels."

"And yesterday in the ruins?" asked Andrews. "What was the trouble there?"

Winthrop grew confused, and all his friend's doubts came back to him with redoubled force. "I read something I didn't like," he said curtly. "It seems the quest of the Garden is unlucky. But, of course, the old fool that wrote that didn't know what he was talking about."

"Oh," said Andrews, shivering in the icy air. "Didn't he?"

"No," replied Winthrop, gruffly. "He didn't."

Next morning marked the final stage of the great attempt. In the early dawn they swallowed some biscuits, barely moistened with coffee, made over a spirit lamp, and began their trying climb. Above them the mountain was crossed to the right by a sharp spur, covered with snow.

Winthrop took out his red-covered book and consulted it with care. "I am right. Just behind that spur," he said quietly.

They were very silent as they toiled up the mountainside. Sometimes one of them missed his footing, and the rope which bound them together—they had been roped since leaving the ruins of the monastery—came taut with a jerk. But for the most part all kept their footing with the ease of mountaineers. And presently, footsore, weary, bleeding, they reached the summit of the spur and beheld beneath them the flaming colors of the Garden of Desire.

It lay far down, apparently in a warm temperate climate, not unlike, it seemed to Andrews, his native California. Through their glasses could be made out stately temples and great palaces, and once —so still was the air—there floated up to them the notes of a great silver bell.

Winthrop, his luminous grey eyes alight, prepared to descend into the valley. The task was one of some difficulty, for they stood upon the summit of a precipice; the whole end of the spur being clear-cut and sharp, the result evidently of a volcanic eruption, which had closed the valley against all egress.

"I don't blame the inhabitants for not getting out that way," Andrews remarked, peering downwards. "Surely you aren't going to attempt to go down there?" he questioned turning to Winthrop.

Winthrop was fastening the uncoiled rope beneath his arms. His face had on it an expression Andrews did not care to see—the rapt, aloof look of the devotee. And beside him stood Ito, stroking his beard and staring down into the valley. "It is long enough to reach that ledge there," Winthrop pointed. "And there seems to be easier going down below. Now, lower away."

He let himself over the edge of the cliff, and Ito and one of the men began to lower slowly. Andrews could see the grotesque yellow robe flutter from beneath the fur coat, as Winthrop spun around in mid-air. Then the rope slackened and he was visible, standing on the ledge.

"We can do it," he called up, making a trumpet of his hands. "There is a path downward."

"Truly devils live there," cried Ito, pointing with a contemptuous finger. A grey cloud had blotted out the valley beneath. "Devils," he repeated, his features working convulsively, "and those who mock at the temples of the gods."

He made a step forward, calling to Winthrop in a voice that was hoarse with passion. Then with a gesture of contempt, he flung the end of the rope over the edge of the precipice.

"Nevermore will he mock the sanctity of the temples," he said grimly.

Andrews stood watching as if turned to stone. He saw Winthrop gaze at the coil of rope that hurtled by him; he knew that he had understood Ito's murderous action in the light of his menacing words. But Winthrop gave no heed to the hillman or his anger. Instead Andrews could see that he was peering through rifts in the cloud, at the Garden of Desire. And presently, with a wave of his hand, he started downward.

From the ridge Andrews watched him with fascinated eyes, as his figure grew smaller and smaller in the distance. The obscuring cloud had drifted away, and the wonderful coloring of the Garden of Desire now stood out like an illustration of the "Arabian Nights."

With a fixed gaze Andrews stood entranced, until Winthrop—now a midget in size—waved a diminutive hand to show that the path curved. He swung to the right and in another moment was out of sight.

Andrews watched until there was no longer a possibility of his friend's return. Then in matter-of-fact fashion—for aloof from civilization men do strange things—he turned about to take vengeance on Ito. From the doing of which he was only prevented by one of those little things fools call accidents. In his eagerness to watch Winthrop he had unconsciously drawn perilously near the edge of the cliff, and as he swung about, his foot slipped and he fell forward on a sharp spur of rock. But for Ito's ready arm he would have rolled entirely over the precipice. He could feel Ito's clutch on his arm, then his head struck on the jagged rock and he remembered no more.

When he came to himself, after interminable days of pain, the little caravan was not far from Peshawar, and Ito was by his side. "The sahib has been very ill," said the chief of the hillmen gravely. "He must not talk."

Andrews looked at the scenery, which he vaguely recognized. The scoundrel then had saved his life, and had brought him back along all that dangerous road. And Winthrop? He beckoned feebly. "Do you get the five hundred rupees?" he asked in a whisper.

Ito shook his head, his eagle face stern and set. "There are bigger things in a man's life, sahib, than all the gold in Krishna Lal's treasure-room," said he, with dignity.

Wanted—A Feeble-Minded Young Man.*

BY MARY MORRISON RAYNAL.

AS Owen Gregory's vacation drew near he found himself too exhausted to plan for an outing. The work of a city minister, with its incessant demands upon heart, brain and soul had sapped his vitality. He longed only to get away from his task of harmonizing discordant factions, of sermonizing, of burying the dead, of living always in the white light which beat upon the pastor of the great First Church.

A magazine advertisement caught his eye: Wanted—A feeble-minded young man to board.

Owen fell to wondering why feeble mindedness was a desirable attribute in a boarder, also who this person might be who slammed the door in the face of intellectuality. There was little upon which the fancy might build. The advertisement was signed only by a number, but this slight mystery was in itself appealing.

Truly, he, whose meteoric flight upward in his profession had been paid for in sore nerves and aching brain, felt feeble-minded enough to suit the most exacting. To be with those who would expect nothing of him, not even the social intercourse of daily life, promised rest so complete that he relaxed in anticipation. In a reviving spirit of boyishness he answered the advertisement.

A note came promptly in reply, brief, dignified. The name signing it, Martha Mooring, bespoke a gentle spinster. The terms were pitifully low. But it was the locality of the unknown Martha that called to him: Connastee Forest, down in old North Carolina. He didn't know quite where it was but it seemed to bring with it the cool breath of the mountains.

Wiring Martha Mooring to expect him, he followed close on the heels of his message. After the long night's ride down to Asheville a local train carried him into the heart of the Blue Ridge. And here was Connastee Forest, a wee station around which had gathered a handful of summer boarders, watching idly for the train. But there

* Copyright, 1912, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved.

was no one who could logically answer to the name of Martha Mooring. The train creaked on; the summer boarders, after eyeing Owen with friendly curiosity, adjourned to the post-office. A slight girl, standing near a decrepit rig, began to unfasten her horse, which had been supported by, rather than fastened to, a neighboring post.

"Your party didn't come, Miss Martha?" inquired the station-master sympathetically.

Owen started forward, "Miss Mooring?"

"Yes," she was evidently disconcerted. "You are not—"

"The feeble-minded young man," Owen assured her gravely.

The girl, with averted eyes, led her horse nearer the platform. After Owen's luggage had been cared for he stood aside to allow her to get in, wondering why such an immaculate young woman should possess such a ramshackle buggy.

Martha Mooring wavered. "It is only a little way. I will walk, you can follow in the buggy."

Owen began to insist upon her riding, to be checked by the shrinking of the little figure. Mounting into the buggy in profound humiliation he followed in her wake.

The girl forged ahead with the free stride of one accustomed to long, rough paths, while Owen bumped along the corduroy road, the soul almost shaken out of his body. They were passing through a narrow valley on each side of which arose the purpling mountains. Lush ferns banked the road-side, tall corn waved about them. Leaving the green of the corn fields they dipped into a glade shadowy with beeches, whose trunks, gleaming pale in the mystic light, seemed akin to the slender figure which glided so familiarly through their depths. The glade gave way presently to a gnarled apple orchard, beyond which rose a knoll on which stood the house, so silvered by Time that it seemed a part of the forest which spread out behind it.

A weazened, bent old man, shrunken and faltering, saw them coming, and leaving the red cow he was driving home from pasture came down to open the gate for them.

"This is Mr. Gregory, Father," the girl paused for the first time to cast a glance at Owen.

A toil-hardened hand went out to meet Owen's warm grasp but there was no other response to his cordial greeting. The pale blue eyes, lighting the wrinkled face, were the kindest, Owen thought, into which he had ever gazed. Words seemed to be trembling just under the white beard. Failing articulation, a shadow chased the eagerness out of the pathetic old face, leaving it with the dumb,

pleading look of a hurt animal. The young minister, yearning to show his sympathy, could only follow the slender white figure which was again leading onward to the house.

The appealing beauty, transcending the shabbiness of the old place, went to Owen's heart. The century-old farmhouse was typically southern—wide verandas, wide rooms, wide doors opening toward the mountains and the sunset.

The girl directed Owen to his room, speaking with the slow distinctness which she deemed necessary in his mental condition. It piqued while it amused him, and as he settled himself in the homely comfortable room he began to shape the role which he should have to play. He had been woefully unobservant of the outward and visible signs of feeble-mindedness, but this being the requirement of his young hostess he must not fail her. Silence would be best at first, he thought, a brooding, non-commital silence. But he who had longed for quiet now found himself alert, bristling with interest. He wanted to probe the mysteries of this old house, to find out how this flowerlike girl had blossomed in her solitude, to know more of this old man—a Zacharias stricken dumb.

After their simple tea, over which the old man lifted a tremulous hand in silent blessing, they went out on the front veranda. A pale glow of sunset still lingered, but the moon, enormous, of burnished gold, was rising over the mountains. Bullbats were flitting like intoxicated shadows through the golden dusk. Soft country sounds swept Owen into memories of his childhood; the sleepy cheep of baby chickens, the insistence of crickets and whippoorwills, the far-away croaking of frogs. He began to want it all to himself. The uncanny silence of the old man, the frightened aloofness of the girl, embarrassed him and made him more self-conscious than he had been in years. He was glad when their early bedtime came.

Going meekly to his room, Owen put out his light, threw open his blinds, and, with feet on the window sill and pipe in mouth, drank in the lonely beauty of the outer world. A mist had crept over the glade, but by straining his eyes he could faintly discern the pale trunks of the beeches, like a band of ghostly sisters.

A frog, of deep bass voice, was hoarsely reiterating: "Spooks, spooks, spooks!"

An owl from the depths of the forest was inquiring: "Who, who, who's here?"

While his mate replied, "A foo', foo', fool's here!"

Owen sat by the window until the solemn clock downstairs struck twelve. So late it seemed, so long-drawn-out the striking that it re-

minded him of the first time he had heard a Neapolitan clock strike twenty-four. Turning toward his bed he noticed the lightness of its covering, and thought of his steamer rug which had been left in the lower hall. Softly turning the knob he pushed open his door to be met by a crash like that of the final judgment. It seemed to the dazed young man that the world was falling to pieces around him. Striking a match, its little light revealed a chair, which had been noiselessly placed against his door, a tin bath tub poised against the chair and tin pans festooned from the door knob—a homemade burglar alarm, but efficacious. A crack opening in the opposite door, Owen had a glimpse of the girl's terrified face. Like a sentry on guard she watched him as he backed into his room. Not daring to risk the pitfalls which the stairs and lower hall might hold he crept into his chilly bed, feeling like a prisoner thwarted in escape.

When Owen came down the next morning, the father and daughter had long since finished their breakfast. Through the open window of the dining room he could see a woolly headed old negress churning on the stone flagged back porch. Her scant homespun skirts, tucked up to the knees, revealed flat, bare feet and bony, ashen ankles. With her dasher she was keeping time to a camp-meeting melody:

I wish I wus er settin' down, er settin' down, er settin' down,
I wish I wus er settin' down in de kingdom uv meh Lawd.

On the other end of the porch Martha, in a fresh red-checked gingham, was shelling peas into an earthenware bowl, like the industrious little *Haus Mutterchen* that she was. Hearing Owen's step she came to give him his breakfast. The sunshiny morning had restored her courage. For the first time she faced him squarely. In her deep blue eyes was an honest kindliness rivalling that of her father's, but these eyes had a beautiful coloring all their own. Something in their grave depths arrested the greeting which had risen to Owen's lips. If she expected an irrelevant remark he would not disappoint her, so—

"Dickery, dickery, dock?" he inquired in ministerial tones.

The girl was game. "The mouse ran up the clock," she responded promptly.

Owen searched his brain for the rest of the Mother Goose rhyme, but it eluded him. The only line which he could grasp was: "Leave them alone, and they'll come home."

"And bring their tails behind them," she supplemented.

After his breakfast Owen plunged into the forest. Under the trees, rhododendrons and wild azalias, now in full bloom, formed

almost impenetrable thickets, their glorious flame of color running the scale from white to deepest pink. Almost drunk with their beauty he dived through the thickets until a little river stayed him, a trout-haunted river which went skipping over rocks that were richly brown under their gurgling sheet of water. On its further side fold on fold of hills rose to meet the gleaming peaks beyond, and clothing these hills were firs, hemlocks, balsams, sombre but life imparting.

On his return he found Martha watching for him. He was not the sort of man with whom a woman could long remain passive. His vivid face, his deep, caressing voice made him irresistible even when posing as an imbecile. Nursery rhymes and games being to his taste, she was cocked and primed for entertainment.

"A good fat hen, and about she goes," she remarked sweetly.

Dropping on the step at her feet, Owen repeated the words after her, and so they went on up to six:

"Six new priests, in new painted pulpits, singing 'Allicum, Greekum.'"

"Five piebald pipers playing 'Shizamy, Shazimy, Shorum.'"

"Four hoary hairy headed hedgehogs, in a hoary hairy hedge sitting."

"Three green geese, in a green field grazing."

"Two ducks, a good fat hen and about she goes."

Owen could no longer repress his laughter, in which, after a second, the girl joined, flushed and dimpling. The old man drew near, an uncertain smile on his wistful face. Their laughter chased away the last remnant of distrust.

Thus began an experience fraught with fascination and bewilderment. In the mornings Martha, like her namesake of old, was too cumbered with her much serving to frolic with him, but in the afternoons she was a leisurely daughter of Mary, pathetically eager for companionship. She told him fairy tales, and sang to him of the frog who would a-wooing go, with a quaint little air of maternal protection. She mothered him, just as she mothered the old man; scolded him when he got his feet wet, and was sternly observant of his diet.

The pose of feeble-mindedness was gradually being discontinued on the ground of Owen's physical improvement. This mountain air had wrought miracles, he was constantly exclaiming, and Martha exulted over each pound that he gained. She delicately refrained from any question of his past, and Owen kept his own counsel.

When nursery rhymes palled, he begged for books from the set of

unpainted shelves reaching almost to the ceiling. She was exceedingly dubious, but finding that they did not excite him let him have his way. A more unexciting collection it would be hard to find, dog-eared school books, ancient histories, and a preponderance of medical works from which he inferred that the old man had been a physician.

That there was something better than books Owen was discovering Each day Martha became more wonderful to him. Her sweet wholesomeness had from the first been apparent, her self abnegation and unswerving rightness made the deeper knowledge of her a blessing. He was constantly contrasting her with his two best known types of women, the one absorbed in the social whirl, the other with modern piosity spending itself in committee meeting and organization.

What peace a wife like her would bring to a weary professional man! A peace, however, that was not for him. She was the light of the world to her strickened old father. To rob him of her would be to rob him of life itself. Nor could the father be brought away with his child. To transplant the old mountaineer would be as hopeless a task as trying to transplant one of his mountains.

There was nothing for him to do but to leave her, Owen argued with his pleading heart. But had Martha no rights, was she to be left to eat her heart out in solitude? There arose another ethical question.

Under this southern moon, in the presence of these solemn mountains, love had sprung full grown into each heart. They struggled to keep up their light banter, but silences would fall, tense, suggestive. The poor little girl's attitude had, it seemed to Owen, resolved itself into that of patient waiting. She was mutely asking, "Why, oh why, don't you tell me?"

His lips shut themselves into grim lines as he agonized for self-control. There was enough of the Puritan in him to make the hard course appear the right course. Martha's first duty was to her father; he was resolved to sustain her in it. But oh, the longing to clasp her to his heart, to let her feel its aching throb.

On the day before that on which Owen was to leave, the old man did not appear at breakfast. Martha's wan face betrayed her misery.

"Father had another heart attack last night," she said quietly.

"You poor child, why didn't you call me?"

"He never wants anyone but me; I can give him the hypodermics."

Without touching her breakfast she slipped back to her patient

and Owen only glimpsed her at intervals during the day. Stopping her at last he insisted upon going for a doctor.

"Father was a doctor himself and he says he knows the tricks of the trade. We have all of the necessary remedies, thank you."

Her quiet dignity forbade discussion. She looked so little for such big burdens and she was bearing them so bravely. Owen's heart was breaking in sympathy, but he was powerless to help, all offers of assistance being steadily declined. The solitude in which father and child had lived through so many years must remain unbroken at the last, no hand but hers could serve him now.

Through that night, in his lonely room, Owen watched as if with her, his ears strained for sounds from below. He was harassed by the unreasoning fear of having failed her. By withholding the confession of his love he had shut himself out from sharing her burden of grief. Toward three o'clock he heard the sound which he had been dreading, those pitiful, gasping sighs which so often precede dissolution. He must go to her now.

He found the old man propped up in a chair, with face ashen gray, the poor, kind eyes blank and staring. The girl was standing by him, supporting him with her slender young arms, the utter exhaustion of her figure testifying that she had stood thus all night. She did not now move or speak, but her eyes dumbly thanked him for coming. Long minutes dragged by, broken only by those shuddering gasps. Then Owen caught a last gleam of expression flickering into the eyes of the dying man. Divining the thought struggling there for utterance he asked, very gently:

"You will leave the little girl to me?"

The poor head tried to nod assent.

After it was all over, and the weary old body was resting in the stone-walled burying ground, Owen asked of his promised wife:

"But why, little heart, did the young man have to be feeble-minded?"

"On poor Father's account;" she suppressed a sob. "After his affliction, the aphasia, you know, he grew so sensitive that he shunned even the neighbors. We needed money and it occurred to me that if we had a boarder who was afflicted in some way himself he wouldn't notice Father. When I explained it to him he thought I was so bright."

"But why not a feeble-minded old lady, or an old man?" Owen persisted.

The wan cheeks flamed as she replied: "I wanted him to be young on my own account."

The Devil's Due.*

BY JOHN HENDERSON GARNSEY.

IN the first place there were two men. There was no woman, save Reddy's friend, and his mother, who merely succeeded in getting killed, and does not count in the story. One of these men was condemned to die by hanging, and the other was as good as dead, for he was an imbecile. He had no mind, and shortly would have no brain, but his great, strong, god-like body was as good as ever. It was one of those punishments for ancestral crimes that sometimes overtake great and good men in this world, when this particular man stepped off a railroad train one day and at the same moment stepped clean out of himself into oblivion. Some people said that his soul had forsaken him in that instant, while others were convinced that he must have been a greatly dissipated man, for the doctors say that such calamities do not come from nothing. However, Robert Bisman had no mind now, where a year ago he had been one of the most promising young business men in the great western city where the three rules of life are "Hustle; hustle; hustle."

The other man was John Toomey, alias Frank Reilly, alias Doctor Keegan, alias half a dozen other names, and known to the police by his professional cognomen of "Reddy Jack." Reddy Jack was in every way different from Robert Bisman. In the first place he had a brain — rather a warped and twisted brain, but still a brain — and a very fertile and active one. In the second place he was small and knotty in form. In the third place, he was not god-like in appearance, for his hair was red, fiery red, and one eye had a decided cast in it, so that he squinted abominably. His days of promise were short in duration, for, having stabbed his mother one fine evening because she would not divide her earnings with him to the extent of giving him all of them,

* Copyright, 1912, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved.

he had been tried and was sentenced to be hung. His bosom friend, her nose badly twisted from one of Reddy's caressing blows, had been before the pardon board and tried to get the sentence commuted on the ground that he was her sole support, but the board wouldn't listen, and so she cursed them and left Reddy to his fate. There was no one to care for him after the hangman had done his work, so the prison physicians understood that science might profit by his death, but they said nothing.

Then Doctor Isenberry, the prison doctor, who happened to know all about Robert Bisman's case, went to the physician having him in charge, and nearly paralyzed him with this remark :

"Let's put Reddy's cerebrum into Bisman's skull !"

Dr. John Marshall, to whom the proposition was made, stared as if he thought that ere long he would have Isenberry on his hands. That gentleman smiled and went on :

"Professor Doctor Golz, of Strasburg, says that he has succeeded in removing the cerebrum of a mastiff without injury to the dog's general physical health. In fact, the dog got along better than before. If this can be done with a German dog, why not with an Irish man?"

"But this means almost certain death."

"Well, it's certain death in any case. Bisman has softening of the brain, hasn't he?"

"Yes."

"He'll die anyway, even though the disease is confined entirely to the cerebrum — to the front part of the head, it may be."

"He certainly will die."

"Now, the presence of that decayed brain in Bisman's head is dangerous, clearly. Suppose we took it out? He might live as an automaton, just as a chicken does when the front part of its head is removed. Well, then, why not put another brain in the place of the decayed one? It would do no harm, and it might do good. In other words, suppose we put Reddy's mind into Bisman's body."

"Isenberry, you beat the devil !"

"Well — I'm willing that the devil should have his due — but I want to try this experiment."

The upshot of it was that the doctors agreed, and the conserva-

tor of Bisman's estate also agreed, though he was not told what the operation was; simply that it was kill or cure.

Reddy Jack went to the scaffold accompanied by a priest, at whom he made grimaces all the way. When asked if he had anything to say before the black cap was adjusted, he grinned, and made a dive at the sheriff, whom he caught by the throat and choked severely before he could be shaken loose. The black cap was forced on his head, and the drop fell, cutting a very choice and particularly vile curse in two as the knotty little neck broke. The newspapers were disappointed, because they hadn't foreseen such a sensation, and Reddy left this world with everybody's curses on his head. Then, before his body was cold, it was cut down, packed in a tank full of hot water, and whisked off to the hospital.

Six eminent surgeons, clothed in long white gaberdines, were awaiting the arrival of the wagon, and had Bisman stretched out on one long table, while another was ready for the reception of Reddy's still warm and limp body. When the rumble of the wheels was heard, three of them commenced operations upon Bisman's head, and the other three received the remains of Reddy, and followed suit. Bisman's cerebrum was in a frightfully decayed state, but Reddy's was sound, and it was a matter of a very short time to exchange the brains, unite the principal arteries, and send Bisman's blood through the criminal's brain. The nerves were united as far as possible, the skull cap was replaced, and the patient, still breathing and with his pulse still beating, was strapped to a couch so that he could not move his head. Then there was nothing to do but wait. And it was a dreary wait, too. For a time it seemed as if the patient was going to be completely paralyzed, or would die. But in about ten days he moved one of his hands. The six surgeons were jubilant, and it was agreed that he would pull through in some way.

And he did. Gradually he commenced to move himself slowly, and to look about. He was stone deaf and had no sense of taste; his sight was impaired, and he seemed to have only partial control over his speech. But there was what had not been present in Robert Bisman for several months — intelligence. Developments were awaited.

When the developments came, they were unexpected and peculiar, though they might have been calculated upon in just that way. As Bisman assumed more control over his speech, the words that came from his lips were the words of Reddy Jack. He swore frightfully, called the nurse vile names when he was not trying to kiss her, and, as he could not hear what was said to him, remonstrance was useless. He insisted on having drinks served at his expense to all who were around him, and when the nurse refused, he swore again. He grew strong all the time, and, about three weeks after he commenced to move, was able to sit up.

Then Doctor Isenberry resolved to test his memory, to see whether he would have to treat Reddy Jack or Robert Bisman, so he brought Reddy's bosom friend up to the room where the patient sat, and confronted him with her. She was not informed what was the object of her coming, and so looked boldly at the man with curious eyes. He looked at her slowly. He seemed to have difficulty in seeing plainly, but an intelligent look gradually came over his face. Then he looked at Doctor Isenberry, whom he recognized for the first time. The doctor whispered to the nurse to send for the other five eminent medical men at once, and when he turned from her, he saw that something was going to happen. His patient was glaring at the woman, who stood there, afraid. Then the veins in the thin neck stood out, his eyes glared, and he howled out a half-articulate curse. It was Reddy Jack's voice, and Reddy Jack's profanity, and more and more of it came. He rose from his chair, — the woman shrunk back, — she had recognized the profanity.

"Is it — is it —" she began, but she did not finish. With an awful yell, Robert Bisman, guided by Reddy Jack, sprang toward her and tried to seize her by the neck. Suddenly the infuriated man stopped, — his head twitched back on his shoulders, — his eyes rolled up in his head, and with an awful contortion he sank to the floor, dead!

So the experiment was ended, and the devil got his due.

On Pier Ninety-Seven.*

BY JAMES FRANCIS DWYER.

PETER, the night watchman, sat in his little shanty at the end of Pier 97 and toasted his feet at the small stove. There was a storm raging outside. Down the river charged the shrieking blasts of the blizzard, and the timbers of the pier groaned before the onslaught. The tramp steamer, *Light of Asia,* rubbed her sunbitten sides against the shivering piles.

"It's a good job that old tub is safe inside on a night like this," soliloquized the watchman. "It's a wonder to me how old Cap. Rudolph can run her backwards and forwards on the Almighty's big oceans. Seems as if one punch from a big wave would stave her sides in."

The door of the shanty was pushed open at that moment, and a tall, gray-haired man stumbled into the little shelter.

"Hello, Peter!" he cried, loudly. "I thought I'd come and keep you company for a while."

"Why, Captain Rudolph! I'm real glad," said the watchman. "I was just sitting here thinking about you an' the old steamer. I was saying to myself — Here, Captain, sit over here."

"No, I'm all right here," cried the gray-haired man. "I'll climb on top of this molasses barrel an' I'll be nice and cozy."

"Well, I was saying to myself that it's a wonder how Captain Rudolph dodges all the perils of the deep."

"Ay, ay," growled the seaman. "The perils of the deep an' all the other perils, Peter."

Peter glanced up questioningly. "It *is* true?" he queried.

"Ay, it's true, Peter," answered Rudolph. "The cowards bolted an hour ago. Every one of 'em except the two mates an' the engineers. The thing got on their nerves.

* Copyright, 1912, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved.

Seamen are the biggest cowards in the world on some things."

"But I — I," stammered Peter, "I thought it was just a yarn that some one had made up."

"Wish it was," snapped Captain Rudolph. "I wish it was, Peter. I had some good boys on that boat, an' now I'll have to take any longshore loafer that comes along."

Peter's little eyes blinked in the light that came from a ship's lantern hanging from the beam above his head. His face showed intense excitement. The stubby fingers writhed around each other as he glanced at the tall man on the molasses barrel.

"An' they were aboard," he muttered. "I mean they were aboard loose."

"Loose is the word, Peter," cried the captain. "That word fits the bill. They were loose all right."

"How did it happen?" asked the watchman.

"Well, it was this way," explained the skipper of the tramp. "We picked up the consignment at Singapore. Twenty-seven monkeys, three orang-outangs, a leopard, and these three that are loose, as you remarked. A greasy Shan looked after the monkeys and the orang-outangs; a tattooed Siamese was valet to the leopard and the three that are loose.

"Four days out from Singapore those two devils started to fight. The Shan reckoned the Siamese was teasing his monkeys, the Siamese complained of the Shan for throwing dirty water over him. White men are hard to deal with, Peter, but nigs are the limit. You can't knock any sense into a nigger's head. No, sir! Sense just whistles in one ear and out the other because there's nothing there to stop it.

"I bumped their heads together, and that didn't improve things. Never take to the sea, Peter. Things that happen on the sea would drive a nervous man like you mad. The sea is for the man without imagination, Peter. Stay right here in your cozy little box and laugh at the stories that bad-tempered skippers spin to you. Why this little place is as cozy as possible."

"But the story," murmured the watchman. "What happened after you bumped their heads together?"

"What happened?" repeated the captain. "Faith, the very devil himself happened to the ship after that, my boy. That

greasy brute of a Shan smashed the box in which those three were imprisoned, and the next minute they had disappeared. You have never seen a hamadryad or giant cobra, have you, Peter? No, you haven't. Well, they're not nice brutes to have anything to do with. Mother o' me! No! And those three were nine feet long, and as poisonous as they're made. They're the biggest horrors on the Malay, Peter. Takes about a hundred natives to catch one of 'em, an' they're scared stiff all the time they're roping 'em in."

Peter the Watchman swallowed noisily. "An' you didn't see where they went to?" he asked.

"See?" cried the skipper. "See? No, Peter! We had no chance to see. The Siamese gave a yell, and before we knew what he was yelling about, those three things had found cover. Found it slicker than a Sioux Indian. That's their game, and nine feet of snake can move mighty hurriedly when it knows that the atmosphere is not healthy. You wouldn't think that twenty-seven feet of snake could get under cover in three seconds, but I'm telling you the truth. We couldn't see any sign of that trinity when we started to hunt for them, and every second of that hunt was giving us thrills up and down our spinal column. We had cold feet, and they were getting colder as we hunted. You bet they were. You never saw a hamadryad, my boy. He's the boss of the snake tribe, an' he knows it.

"Night flopped down on us, and those three were still loose. Loose is a good word, Peter. They were somewhere on that old tramp, and we were mighty careful how we moved around. Those sailors didn't want to go on deck. What do you think of that? They were scared stiff. They walked around like dancing masters, one doing the work, and a mate holding a lantern to scare off the snake. One big Swede thought he saw one of the snakes dancing a Turkey Trot on the deck, an' the blamed idiot nearly broke his neck tumbling down the companionway. You can bet your last nickel that the watch didn't go to sleep that night."

"It was terrible," muttered Peter the Watchman.

"You're right, Peter," said the skipper. "It was more than terrible. It was stupendously terrible, if I might use the words

that way. Twenty-seven feet of snake stowed away in some part of the old tramp, an' the blamed crew walking round on tiptoe, with their eyes nearly popping out of their heads. That Siamese made matters worse. He locked himself in a cabin an' refused to come out. He reckoned that the snakes would make a special set at him because he was their jailer, an' he told things through the keyhole about those snakes that put those lubbers of sailors off their feed. Thompson, the first mate, wanted a few of 'em to volunteer for a search in the cargo, but they weren't on. Not a one of 'em would tackle the job. When he ordered them down, the cusses refused to obey, an' Sheol was mighty near loose on that deck."

"I don't blame 'em," stammered Peter.

"Course you don't," said the tramp captain. "You're scared of snakes, too. I'll admit that twenty-seven feet of snake isn't a nice thing to be loose on board a ship, but it wasn't my fault. It was the fault of the blamed niggers, but larruping that big Shan didn't get those three back into their boxes. Not much. Those reptiles were stowed away in some corner of that craft, and all our searching couldn't bring them out. Would you have liked a passage with us, Peter?"

"No! No!" gurgled the watchman. "Your story turns me sick. No, I wouldn't ship on a boat that carried snakes. Why, you can't — you can't get away from them if they get out of their boxes."

"That's right, Peter," laughed the captain of the steamer. "You can't hop overboard, can you? And the blamed snakes won't. The snake has enough sense to know that it is a mighty big swim to the shore. Why a Texan steer knows that much. I've pushed five hundred steers overboard when the old *Lady Bountiful* struck a rock off the coast of Newfoundland, and those steers knew that they were facing the Big Water. My, didn't they! They bellowed like the mischief when the cattle punchers pushed an' pricked them, an' those — "

"You told me about them," interrupted the watchman. "You told me that twelve months ago. I want to hear about the snakes."

"Well, there's nothing to hear about them," said the captain shortly. "I wish there was. They're in the cargo or they've

climbed on to the wharf an' sloped uptown. The mob think that they're still in the cargo. That's why the lubbers cleared out this evening. They're scared stiff as I told you. Four weeks of uncertainty put their nerves on the blink, an' when they got a chance to bolt to-night, why they took it. Now I must be off to see what sort of a mob I can rustle up to shift her cargo in the morning. You come around if you want to see one of those blamed hamadryads, Peter. I bet those three pesky reptiles are stowed away in the cargo unless they were cunning enough to sniff land and hop off in the dark. Good-night, Peter. If you want to see a real big cobra come around in the morning when I get some plucky guys busy at the hatches."

The gray-haired skipper opened the door and passed out into the night, leaving Peter the Watchman to ponder over the tale. Peter had heard that the crew had deserted the *Light of Asia,* and now he knew that he had heard no idle rumor.

"Three of 'em, nine feet long," he muttered, addressing the stove. "An' him sitting up there on top of that molasses barrel telling me about it like as if they were three insects instead of —"

Peter stopped, his eyes fixed upon the floor, his mouth wide open. *In the shadows at the side of the barrel, something was moving!*

Peter the Watchman jerked his head forward and gave a gurgle of horror. He attempted to rise, but his legs refused to obey the order his brain flashed to them. He attempted to lift himself by clasping the arms of the battered chair, but his arms lacked the strength. And out of the shadows something was creeping swiftly across the floor towards him!

Peter attempted to cry out, but his dry tongue refused to fashion the call for help. The thing was between him and the door. The faint light from the ship's lantern fell upon the smooth, shining surface of the approaching horror, and the stubby fingers attempted to drive their nails into the palms of his hands as he watched. Straight towards him it came. There was no escape. The perspiration ran down his face. The most venomous snake in the world, Captain Rudolph had said. Nine feet long! The devilish creeping thing seemed to know that the man was at its mercy. Slowly but surely it covered the space that separated

the battered chair from the barrel, and Peter gasped like a drowning man.

"Oh — Oh," he gurgled. "Help! Help! *Help!*"

* * * * * * *

It was the skipper of the *Light of Asia* who was the first to make the discovery. He dashed into the little shanty at five o'clock the next morning, but the moment he put his foot inside the door he slipped forward on his face and hands, and the shanty echoed to a seafaring vocabulary that had earned Rudolph a reputation throughout the Orient.

"What the ——— ———!" he shrieked, scrambling to his feet. "Why the ——— ——— molasses has run all over the floor. Peter! Peter! You sleepy idiot, wake up. I must have kicked the plug out of this barrel when I jumped off it last night. Hey, Peter! What the dickens — Gee! Something's wrong! Peter! Peter! *Peter! Wake up!*"

But Peter the Watchman slept on, his eyes fixed on the middle of the black shining pool that covered the floor of the shanty.

A Ring and a Ringster.*

BY HOWARD MARKLE HOKE.

SPICER McFLIMM usually chewed his cigars. "People smoke for all sorts of reasons," he declared in a burst of nicotine philosophy, "rest, recreation, settler for too much dinner, a frill on conviviality, a chaser of loneliness, a chauffeur for dull care, a bracer for the brain. Puffing blue fumes don't size up to any of them for me, but chewing a cigar does the trick. Every man to his own way. The steady thump-thump of my jaws on a twenty-five center is one of the new-fangled vibratory treatments for my gray matter."

He was enjoying this treatment one September morning when I came to his porch on my way down town. I bade him the time of day; then accepted an invitation to sit awhile, for I saw that he was being properly stimulated for one of his reminiscences.

He was not exactly a detective, although he had rounded up a number of noted crooks, but "just a useful," as he called himself. If a butler or a coachman or a cook or a chauffeur were wanted, Spicer could lay his hand on a competent man in a day. If one wished to buy an old-time mahogany, with worm holes not bored by a twentieth century gimlet, Spicer knew the trail to the right antique shop. He had found missing men, and had caused others to be missing when they should have been.

"Spicer," I asked, "is Dudley Wingfield out of politics for good?"

"That depends, as usual, on—the lady," he answered.

"Give me the tale, Spicer," I cried.

He chewed retrospectively for a minute or two. "Wingie was certainly done up at the last municipal set-to in February," he said at last, "with the slickness that is possible when there are dollars on one side and doughnuts on the other. We sure held the crullers, stacks of them, and they had been fried in plenty of fat belonging to somebody, I can tell you. The Ring simply cut Dudley to rags and dumped the tatters over the fence. Most of us were sore, but

* Copyright, 1912, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved.

nobody heard anything from us but the sound of our saws.

"One night—in May, I think—I came up with Wingie on the street, and he told me he had retreated to Eastburn, and it was his *congé* to the world.

"'Monastery?' I asks.

"'No,' he says, 'Queen Anne with embellishments. I'm going to take the summer to decide whether to go at the Ring again or let them wallow in their corruption.'

"'Captain,' I advises him, 'dive deep for a spell. There never was a gang that didn't graft itself to destruction. Some of these days the city machine will get so honeycombed with deviltry that it will cave under a baby's hand. Be ready, then, Captain, for we'll need you to scoop up the honey.'

"Along in July I got a wire from him, asking me to come to Eastburn on the first train. The first was a freight, but if a fellow can melt into the environment, as it were, a caboose is just as good as a Pullman. You see more, you learn more, and you don't have a porter dusting you with his broom so as to dust you with his whisk.

"I found Wingie in his Queen Anne after I had walked up a winding path through the embellishments. He was smoking in his library. He opened up a cedar cabinet of beauties with gaudy bands, and I took one to chew. It was a room to see, that library—up-to-dateness sprawling on the floor, hanging on the walls and plastered on the ceiling. It reminded me of a sales room without the price tickets. Along one side were tiers of sectional book cases, with fronts like cathedral windows, and back of the glass were books that were never meant for handling in this dirty world. All the furniture was bound in bright red hides, and there were pictures of landscapes and marines with yachts in the full sunlight, and chorus girls hung back in the shadows where they belonged. There wasn't a dot of ink on the white pad on his table. Wingie hadn't been writing letters or speeches to constituents. I noted that at a glance.

"'Pipe the lady's name, Captain,' I says without ado.

"He glares at me about three-fourths wrothy, and puffs Havana weed imported from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Young man, I don't need a hint to get wise to the influence of a supreme petticoat. I've caught it across a degree of latitude. It's not visible to the ordinary eye, but it showed up on Wingie as plain as if the silk skirts were at that moment swishing among the other furnishings. It's in the way a man acts and looks at you, or don't look, because

the odds are that about ninety-nine hundredths of his mind is off where the lawn is fluttering.

"'Oh, come, Spicer,' he says, 'you may be slick in some matters, but you've never done feats as a mind reader.'

"'Never mind about her name, then, Captain,' I says. 'Just what's the matter between you and her. That's why you wired, isn't it?'

"'You've heard,' he puts at me.

"'Not a syl,' I tells him, 'but there's the sure perfume of a peach blossom around here somewhere.'

"He laughs, sits down and gives me the parable. Since coming to Eastburn, he says, he had met a woman who was the finest that ever came down from heaven to breathe common ozone and tread a muddy earth. I'll spare you his enthusiastic flights. I could see that he had tinted ribbons wrapped all around his heart, tied into a bow and February fourteenth labels pasted on the fringed ends. That morning he had eddied across her doorsill and found her doing the lachrymose. The weakness of a man's fellows certainly does make one feel like a tombstone with a mouldy epitaph on a rainy day. Let them see a tear balancing itself on an apple-red cheek, and they'll forget mother, home and heaven. There's no cheek nor tear present on this porch, or I wouldn't be talking so big."

He stopped with a grunt of derision, chewed for a minute, then went on:

"It seems that the tearful dolly had lost a solitaire ring of high candle power the night before. It had come by express that afternoon from a friend, she had explained to Wingie. She had been looking at it in her library, she said, when she was called to another part of the house, and when she came back, there was the kid box all right, but the shiner—oh, where was it?

"'Spicer,' Wingie says, 'you must get that ring back at once.'

"'Captain,' I asks, 'did Louisa Ann—'

"'Her name is Marian,' he breaks in, haughty as a Britisher with a poacher.

"'Pardon me, Captain,' I apologizes, 'did Miss Marian Jones—'

"'Dorringer,' he breaks out like a cannon cracker on the Sunday before the Fourth.

"'Did Miss Marian Dorringer,' I goes on, 'give you a line on the gent that anted up the trinket?'

"He flies around at me, first red as the hide on his chairs, then as pale as the blotter on his table.

"'What do you mean by that, Spicer?' he says, dropping his cigar into the hand-painted crock.

"'Oh, come, Captain,' I puts it straight at him. 'You're no babe in swaddlings. You know as much, or as little, of their ways as any of us. The sky on a summer night don't take to stars any more according to nature than a woman does to diamonds. Maybe the night would bluster if it misses one star, and no doubt a woman would fret and fume a bit over one sparkler lost out of the gemmery, but when she pines and calls on her friends to rescue the perishing, you can gamble to the limit that some man has shed that diamond shine into her life. So, Captain, why are you and I messing in this job? Why doesn't she wire her precious to come and get the crystal back or ante up another one with a few extra carats thrown in as comforters?'

"He was doing about four laps to a minute around the border of the rug, but pretty soon he pulls up and says:

"'I don't care a rap for all you say on that point, Spicer. You get that ring back and get it quick. I never saw anybody so relieved as she was when I told her I would do everything in my power to find the diamond, and I'm a man of my word, Spicer.'

"'Worse and more of it,' I says. 'She's afraid to let the capital him know she'd be so careless with his tokens. You're down in small type on her list, but you'll do as well as any other gent to save her from a wrath that might sweep a fireside from her near prospects.'

"'Are you going to get that ring back or not, Spicer?' he thunders. 'Or shall I wire for one of the regular force?'

"'Let us repair to the damsel's habitation, Captain,' I says in the lingo of the ten cent melodrama.

"The cage we went to was one of the ornate sort, out in a part of the town that sight-seers auto through, and the bird inside was well worth Wingie's taking a losing chance on. I didn't blame him a word after I looked at her; fact is, in a minute after the ring was mentioned I was a toady to a tear that trickled down and nestled in a dimple.

"I heard the story of the loss in tones that made me think of the output of a candy mill. I gobbled it down and plead for more. The pretty little thing had me going after that bauble from the moment she rustles into the parlor. I'm leary on the matter now all right, but I'm only a man in the presence of a blubbering goddess.

"'Set your heart at rest, Miss Dorringer,' I comforts her when we gets back to the parlor after I looks at the room where she'd sampled the gem before it was lifted. 'The ring is the same as on

your finger again. I'll have nippers on The Kid before a week.'

"'Who's The Kid?' Wingie pipes up, as chipper as a sparrow as soon as he sees Dolly smile again.

"'A new porch climber that's working this section,' I explains. 'Miss Dorringer, painters and musicians and actors and writers have their styles; so have crooks. Kid the Climber fairly dotes on this kind of a pinch. It is well you went out of the room or you'd had an interview with the boy that might have lingered in your thoughts. I know his tracks as if they'd been made in snow. I'm obliged to you and the Captain here for putting me next to a handsome pull like this.'

"'I'm so glad you think it will be easy,' sings the lark, and Wingie looks at her with that glad-to-die-for-you adoration that the popular novels are built on. 'How can I ever repay you, Mr. Spicer, if you bring the ring back to me?'

"'By giving me the pleasure of seeing it safe and sound on your finger again,' I answers, with a sly glance at Wingie to warn him that he and I could judge a whole lot by the finger the dame would clip the hoop on. 'Let me have the kid box to help me, if you please.'

"'Spicer,' Wingie says, as we walked back toward the Queen Anne, 'you're mighty eager to oblige my rival now by getting back the ring.'

"'You don't come within a thousand miles of me, Captain,' I answers, 'I tried to bluff you off this girl business, but I know now why I can't. I've seen her, and she's a hummer. The point is that the political pot is boiling in town, and we need you to throw in the pepper. Some of us know mighty well that politics can't be reformed until the dents are hammered out of human nature, the cracks and breaks patched up, and the poor thing beaten into a brand new shape, but a lot of folks down there don't know that little point, and they're calling you a reformer, with a capital R at each end of the title, and they're mad clean through their pretty righteousness at the Ring for dumping the only honest injun among them. They're whooping it up for a change, but the Gangsters say it's nothing but a lone wolf howling in the wilderness. We're going to count noses next week. See! If this little lady—bless her heart!—don't open up a page of her soul and read you a love ditty of it, you won't care a plugged nickle for the leadership. You won't be worth much until you've solved her pretty riddle. But we must smash the machine, Captain.'

"'And set up one of our own in its place,' he says, with a grin

that was mighty heathenish for a reformer with capitals at each end and one in the middle.

"'Sure,' I says, 'we're not aiming to start a Young Men's Christian Association.'

"In five days I wires him to come down, and I went in the evening to his city apartments. As soon as I drew my focus on him I saw that he'd come against his wishes. Queer, ain't it, that when a man puts off the peach season until Wingie's age—in the neighborhood of thirty-five, I guess—he begrudges every minute he spends outside the orchard.

"'Has the little lady given you a line on the other gent yet?' I asks.

"He colored up, and I caught the heft of the old saying that you can't tell how much grit a man has until he's in love. I've known men that weren't afraid of God, man or devil, go plumb to the rattles when they went up against a satin dolly to find out whether it's yes or no.

"'I haven't had a good chance to ask her yet, Spicer,' he says.

"'Cats and crocodiles,' I says, 'you don't expect her to deal you a chance open-handed out of the deck, do you, Captain? She don't know it, but the little woman has got herself into city politics, good and proper. The braves are going to meet next Friday, and you've got to make a chance with the Eastburn divinity before then. I've corralled the trinket, and all you have to do is to speak your little piece and—'

"A knock fell on the door. Wingie opened it and I hears a voice asking for me. I gets up and finds Barney Ebbs there. I asks him in, introduces him to Wingie, and we all sit down together.

"'Captain,' I says, "Barney has made himself the leader of the tenth this summer. A turn of his hand up there will set the whole ward hell-bent for reform. Barney has been a bartender, but he has seen a light and wants to live clean and decent. He wants to rent a shack and flame out a haberdashery. I'm advancing him a little roll of two hundred and fifty myself, but he's still shy three hundred. I want to give you the chance, Captain, to give him that much, and he'll give you a legal string on the linen. Correct, Barney?'

"'Straight as a shirt pleat,' he answers. 'I knows the gents furnishing business clean through to the back seam, and it's a cinch. Put me into that little hang-out on the corner, and I'll have the boys mad to cut the liver out of the Ring.'

"'I'll endorse your check over to Barney, Captain,' I proposes, 'and he'll give us his receipt.'

"Wingie's not easy by a whole lot, but he sees I have more than lining up my sleeves, and the deal is closed. Barney goes out bowing so that he almost brushes the nap of the rug with his eyebrows. After awhile I walk the floor and my foot strikes something. I lift it up and says:

" Well, if Barney ain't left something on the floor, Captain. Looks like a box with a pair of cuff buttons in it.'

"I hands it over to Wingie. He rips off the sinews and skin, and in a minute, suffering saints, if he ain't standing there looking at the solitaire ring in the dolly's kid box.

" 'Kid the Climber,' he says, his eyesight going through me like a screw in a cork, 'not collars and cuffs.'

" 'The same,' I owns up. 'I fixed it up so the Kid wouldn't be pinched and you wouldn't be compounding a felony.'

" 'Spicer,' he asks, solemn as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, 'is this straight or are you—'

" 'Captain,' I turned him off, 'the meeting's Friday night, and we've got to make scrap iron of the Machine. Sorry I can't linger with you, but I have a chore or two before I tumble in. Goodnight.'

"This was Monday. I waited all day Tuesday and until afternoon Wednesday for Uncle Sam or the Western Union to bring me word from Wingie, but both went to the bad. I was simply smothered in questions about him. The boys hooked interrogation points into me everywhere. The political temperature was up in the nineties and a thunderstorm brewing. The young braves thirsted for the attack, or thought they did. The Reform graybeards—they were nearly all old but they scented the flesh pots all the same—rattled around in a righteous ferment, declaring that the city was headed for the bow-wows at automobile pace. Ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the Reformer don't know as much about running a mill with the hosts of craft and graft as one of our little brown brothers knows of Kalamazoo. I remember a case where they had the Regulars maced to a pulp, but they didn't know a victory when they saw one, and while they loafed around quoting precepts, the Gang snapped up the laurel from under their very heels. Still no word from Wingie. Wednesday afternoon I saunters up to Eastburn on an express, and found him strolling through the embellishments.

"I see in a moment that the ribbons around his heart were rumpled and the valentine labels were sadly crimped. He had run against a case of jolt, that was certain. There are all sorts of jolts,

but, queer enough, the hardest comes from the tenderest human quarter. Wingie sure had an over-the-Styx look in his eye. If Beelzebub had had the city in his scoop, ready to heave it into the everlasting Bessemer, Wingie wouldn't have twisted his tail for a reprieve. Reform had shriveled up and was squeezed into the space of a lady's finger band.

"'Captain,' I asks, 'have you gladdened the maid's heart with a return of her jewel?'

"'I haven't given it to her yet, Spicer,' he owns up.

"'With the legions of Reform and Eternal Rebuke to Deviltry in high places drawn up on the field and waiting for the Champion.'

"'Spicer,' he says, with a dull eye, 'since yesterday she won't mention the ring.'

"'Chuck your duds into your suit case, Captain,' I advises, 'and we'll get a move on for town. It's all up between you and the dolly. She's 'fessed up to the gent paramount; he's been to see Tiffany and has sent on another third finger gewgaw.'

"'I'm with Reform to the last ditch, Spicer,' he says, with no fire whatever in his eye, 'but this ring belongs to her and she ought to have it. You got it back and you ought to give it to her. Go over while I pack my grip.'

"I lopes over to the cage and waits for birdie in her parlor. Gowns of the Greeks, but it was a fetching bit of household plumage she flashes on me—lawney and lacey and loop-holey around the neck and up the sleeves. In a twinkle she had me going again, mentally giving the Reformers the ultimate skedaddle, and sensing the wherefore of Wingie's lukewarmness. But it wasn't birdie's warbling day. She was shy around the optics and blushy on the cheeks and ears and my welcome was a twin icicle to a book agent's. Something with avoirdupois had two-stepped on her friendliness and mashed it. The preempting gent had bidden her never mind the gimcrack; his bank account was good for gems galore.

"But I take the kid box from my pocket, springs the lid and reaches it toward her. I expected she would spring up, maybe blubber a bit, and then string out some 'hah hahs' to the tune of a laud or two of my detective ability. But one thing from creation to eternity, you can't count on them. She sits staring at the ring; then she goes white around the brows, vermillion on the jowls and her lips went trembly as rose leaves in a zephyr. I never was much of a petticoat diplomat, and in the next minute I thought of more things that wouldn't hit the pace than in any previous sixty seconds of my immortal career.

"'Mr. McFlimm,' she asks at last, 'where is Mr. Wingfield?'

"'In his lodge putting on his paint and feathers,' I replies.

"'The telephone is out in the hallway, Mr. McFlimm,' she says. 'Get Mr. Wingfield over as soon as possible.'

"A seraph at the exchange put me next to Wingie; then I returns to the parlor, and, with the shiner sparkling on the table, birdie does some hopping and twittering around without lighting on it that didn't seem possible when I was right there. Presently there was a 'hank hank,' a 'chug chug,' and Wingie's gasoline chariot cavorts up to the curb. The meeting of the two was like a flood of joy trying to break down a dyke of embarrassment.

"'Dudley,' she says, and stops.

"'Yes, Marian,' says he.

"They had come to Marianing and Dudleying, and I sees the flag of Reform hanging limp against the staff.

"'Dudley,' she repeats, 'Mr. McFlimm has brought me a ring, but there's something wrong somewhere. Yesterday one of my maids confessed that the ring lying on my table was too much of a temptation for her, and she gave it back to me.'

"There was a situation for a play-carpenter, I tell you. Lucky for me, she kept her eyes fast on Wingie and he kept his on her, so I had a chance to shed my mortification and drop it out of sight. By the time they looked around I was smiling at them as easy and jocose as a former pastor at a Sunday School picnic.

"'Spicer,' Wingie says, 'I meant to warn you the other night that you were playing a dare-devil game, but you wouldn't let me.

"'Anything for the mighty cause of Reform, Captain,' I answers.

"'Kid the Climber was a character in fiction, then,' he went on.

"'Written by Spicer McFlimm without the aid of a Correspondence School,' I answers; then to put matters up to the edge, I ventures: 'But what's the odds, Captain? You meant to offer little bless-her-heart a ring anyhow, didn't you?'

"Well, you should have seen them. If I had been appointed to give a prize for the best tomato red blushes, I would have called off the match and pronounced it a tie. When dolly went white, Wingie went red; then they vice versied over and over like an electric sign. Tradition is against me, I know, but at a time like that a woman's trembles are a mere quiver to the man's case of malignant vibrations. I call on Bernard Shaw to back me up. I see Wingie was struck tongue-tied, and it was up to me to close the deal; so I says:

"'Do take his ring, Miss Dorringer, and turn a bit of stupidity on my part into a stroke of glittering diplomacy.'

"'I'll do it for that and a few other reasons,' she says, with a gurgle, and out goes her tapering left third digit as skillfully as if she's been practicing the trick. Wingie gets clean blind and can't hit the finger at first, but he finally fits the circlet on as snug as a rubber band around a stick of mint candy. You've seen a rocket go up at night and splash into all sorts of spangles and sparks. Well, that was Wingie's face.

"'I can't tell you, Dudley, how glad I am that I need not write my old school girl friend that her ring was lost,' sings the birdie like a thrush on a summer twilight. 'She sails to-morrow to live in Japan and it would have worried her on the voyage if she had known that I had lost her present.'

"'But why didn't you tell me, Marian?' Wingie puts in, as bold now as a Roman legion with transparencies inscribed to Caesar.

"'Don't you see I couldn't explain who my ring was from?' she asks. 'If I had, you might have thought that I wished you to—but I'm sure you see what I was afraid you'd think, Dudley.'

"'Sure he sees,' I puts in. 'But, Captain,' I goes on, walking to the door, 'how about the Cause of Reform and Everlasting Rebuke to the Ring?'

"'Spicer,' he answers, 'the Ring can roll to perdition for all I care. Good-bye.'"

Spicer had chewed almost to the end of his cigar. He paused awhile and I asked him:

"Where is Wingfield now? You know I've been abroad for a year and haven't kept track of things."

"Oh, the two are off for a two years' honeymoon circuit around the sphere," he answered.

"How about the fight against the Gang?" I asked further.

"The boys would have me head it," he answered, "but we're licked to a crushed pie. The Reformers are nice gentlemen, sweet and pretty in their manners, and fuller of school book mottoes than a hymnal of hymns, but when I offer to touch their pockets they squeal like a case of appendicitis."

A Message From Morse.*

BY GEORGE SEIBEL.

HER eyes had a roguish twinkle in their blue depths, and her hair a golden gloss under the afternoon sun. So Harry Thompson and Clara Dennick had become good friends, although on the first day that she began receiving messages at the same table in the broker's office Harry had brooded upon the invasion of man's sphere by the new woman, deriving doubtful consolation from the contemptuous thought that she "wouldn't last long."

Six months had passed, and there she was still, translating the heartless voice of the ticker as it spelled out riches or ruin for the eager-eyed men who frequented the customers' room. Harry Thompson had to admit to himself that Miss Dennick was as good as any man he had ever worked with, except McSwiggerly—but Mac was no good unless he was two-thirds drunk, and it was hard to gauge him exactly. From toleration to appreciation, and then to admiration, was a natural and easy process, assisted by the afternoon sun and the reluctance of the Lambs to gambol into the Street to be shorn.

When the two operators found they were interested in the same things, their acquaintance ripened into warmer regard. At least it did so on Harry Thompson's part, for there was sentiment mixed with his gray matter. Let no one think that because a man's name is Thompson, and his friends hail him Harry, he must be an ordinary sort of a chap, with no thoughts above the batting averages of Hans Wagner and Ty Cobb or the vocal scintillations of Marie Dressler. This particular Harry Thompson had dabbled in Theosophy and read Voltaire, just as if his name had been R. Emerson Smythe. At present he was engaged in an investigation of spiritualism, and had arrived at the point where the investigator wags his head wisely and declares that "there's something in it." His acquaintance with Clara Dennick had somewhat cooled the ardor of his psychic quest, at first, but when he discovered that she, too, believed there

* Copyright, 1912, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved.

was "something in it" his ardor was fanned into fresh flame.

"I have a friend who has been developing himself as a medium," Harry told her one afternoon—it was the day that only two thousand shares of Steel Common were sold during the entire session. "He has promised to give me a private séance as soon as he has been sufficiently developed, and of course I would know there's no trickery there, because Jim and I went to school together, and I know him through and through."

"There's a great deal in that," assented Clara, "and one reason why I have never gone to a séance is that with strangers one doesn't know what trickery is on foot, and can't take steps to catch them without getting into a muss."

"I wish you could come along to James Congdon's séance when he's ready to give it. His sister and a young married couple who live in the same flat have been sitting with him. He says a circle is most successful when about half the sitters are women—positive and negative, you know."

That was how it started, and several weeks later Harry Thompson and Clara Dennick set out to attend a private séance at the Congdon apartments. By this time the young man was interested in Clara much more than in the subliminal self or the fourth dimension. He dreamed of the burnished glory of her sun-kissed head, as he had seen it several times during the few weeks when the sun sends a few pale gleams into the cavernous street where the dragons of finance have their lair. He thought of her blue eyes every time he caught a glimpse of the clear sky. He looked up the name Clara in the Dictionary—in the Appendix, where the meaning of R. S. V. P. and the pronunciation of Beersheba may be found—and thus he learned that Clara means "bright, illustrious," a definition very creditable to the Dictionary.

Yet there is no reason why budding affection should shun the séance room. Indeed, if the sly allusions of the humorous paragraphers are any index to the actual conditions that favor courtship, these are very similar to those under which the shade of Bob Ingersoll describes the heavenly mansions or the manes of Julius Cæsar play "Sweet Marie" on a guitar. Both Spiritualism and Cupid economize on gas. Therefore Harry Thompson took Clara Dennick without much reluctance to the séance, though he would have preferred to sit on a park bench and talk trivial nothings to avoid saying what he most wanted to say.

The sister of the budding medium—a pale, slender girl with a wisp of a voice—met them at the door. "Come right in," she said,

for she knew Harry; "Jim was wondering whether the prospect of rain had scared you off."

"Miss Dennick and I are too deeply interested to let a few clouds deter us," answered Harry, and then they were ushered into the sitting room, where the young married couple from the same flat were already unfolding their psychic experiences. The man was, as Harry soon learned, a salesman in the tea department of a retail grocery house, a line of trade remarkably conducive to the development of a sensitive psychical oganization. Mr. Sippit—such was his name—declared that he had often felt a cold breath brush his brow when people who were psychics came near him; he could feel it *now* as Jim came in from the other room. Mrs. Sippit iconoclastically suggested that it might have been a draught, but no attention was paid to her irreverent interruption.

After the preliminaries of introduction and meteorological conjecture had been disposed of, some one proposed that the sitting should begin, as sometimes the spirits were slow. So the little company adjourned to an adjoining room, remoter from the roar of the trolley cars and the glint of electrical street signs.

They arranged themselves around a woolen table, with Sue Congdon opposite the psychic James, a young man who looked about as spiritual as a safety razor advertisement. Miss Dennick and Mrs. Sippit were seated to right and left of the medium, Harry Thompson and the purveyor of Oolong on either side of Sue, and everybody agreed that this was an ideal distribution of the positive and negative elements in the circle.

"We should remain rather quiet," cautioned the medium. "At any rate, no trivial conversation or badinage should be indulged in. We must get into the proper frame of mind."

"It's everything in the frame of mind," concurred Mr. Sippit. "You can't expect no manifestations from the spirits unless you're in a frame of mind. It's like fishing—some days you can't get a bite, and you don't know why. If the truth was known, it might turn out that it was all in your frame of mind—sending currents of repulsion along the rod and line to push off the trout and bass. On *them* days you might as well bait your hook with a dill pickle, for you won't catch no fish."

When Mr. Sippit had delivered himself of this bit of Waltonian and supernormal lore, as to the habits of fish and phantasms, Sue Congdon turned down the light. The shades had already been drawn, and had been pinned to the window frames in places where they showed a tendency to admit inquisitive moonbeams or electrical

flickers. It was now so dark that Harry Thompson could not distinguish the trumpet lying on the table right before him—for James Congdon felt himself called to become a trumpet medium.

Now Sue turned on a music box which gave forth a sickly tinkle as it played "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and "Angels Ever Bright and Fair." Mr. Sippit felt it in his bones that they were going to have some remarkable manifestations; he had an icy prickling in his fingers as they lay flat upon the table. "It's rather chilly," the materialistic Madame Sippit suggested. It is people upon this low animal plane that refer astral apparitions to cold mince pie and consider telepathy a mild variety of delirium tremens.

Harry Thompson also had a sudden intuition, not altogether psychical, that Mr. and Mrs. Sippit were now holding hands across the table. He knew of no unfavorable influence such a proceeding might exert upon any manifestations. The spirits would understand if any of them had ever been married or in love. He wondered if a general holding of hands, by people strongly sympathetic, might not prove extremely effectual in promoting the atmosphere of receptive calm supposed to be most congenial to the disembodied intelligences. He wished he had mentioned it before the sitting began—to reach across the table now and take Miss Dennick's hand might frighten her, as this was her first séance and she would not be expecting such a manifestation.

While thoughts like these were flitting through Harry's brain, the circle had been attuned to expectancy and sensitive alertness. They were in that state of mind, or rapidly approaching it, when a leaking spigot produces mysterious rappings and a dust-cloth swaying in the dusk assumes the lineaments of your departed grandmother's visage.

"Did you hear anything?" asked Sue.

"I see lights moving to and fro," declared the medium.

"And I am sure I felt a cold breeze across the nape of my neck," asserted Mr. Sippit in an awesome tone.

"All the conditions are favorable," the medium continued. "We shall have some manifestations worth while, unless I am very much deceived. Throngs of spirits are now around us. I can see their faces plainly. There is a girl in white, with a rose in her hair, right above your left shoulder, Mr. Thompson. She is looking at you fondly. Do you know her?"

"Can't imagine who she is," truthfully and somewhat reproachfully asserted that uncomfortable target of spirit eyes.

"There's another at your right—a tall, slender, pale young woman,

very beautiful—oh, so beautiful, and so sad! She is stretching her hand out toward you. Can you think of such a one in the spirit world?"

"Is Jim trying to make me out as a sort of spiritual Don Juan, with an astral harem?" thought Harry, and again replied, more tartly than before, "I can't imagine who she is."

The medium next discovered an elderly gentleman hovering near Mrs. Sippit. Mr. Sippit also thought he could make him out. "It may be your Uncle Tobias," he suggested.

"Suppose we ask him?" the medium hinted.

"Are you my Uncle Toby?" inquired Mrs. Sippit quaveringly, and "rap-rap-rap" the spirit answered in the affirmative, using the customary code of the séance room. A series of interrogations elicited from the uncle various bits of edifying information—a great stroke of good fortune was in store for her; she would recover the rhinestone earring that had been missing three weeks; there would be something in the newspaper next week that would interest her. She felt sure this was her Uncle Tobias, and Mr. Sippit could now see him quite plainly.

Soon the spirits began to come in droves and squadrons. Mary Stuart furnished some important forecasts of the races; Emile Zola declared Louisa Alcott to be the greatest American authoress; John Wesley asserted that LaFollette would be our next President; and some old Egyptian Pharaoh, whose name no one could guess, expressed the conviction that Doctor Cook had reached the Pole. At one time McKinley, Peter the Hermit, Cleopatra and Sitting Bull were in the room together, standing right behind Harry Thompson's chair. It is much easier to summon any spirit from the vasty deep than to get a man around the corner on the telephone.

"Now there's an old man with a flowing gray beard looking right at you, Mr. Thompson," announced Congdon. "He is pointing his finger at you. Do you know any one of that description in the spirit world?"

"Is it Charles Darwin?" queried Harry Thompson, thoroughly inured now to receiving confidential messages from emperors, philosophers, and famous beauties of bygone days.

"Rap," came a single response—no, it was not Charles Darwin.

"Is it Tolstoy?" asked Thompson again, racking his brain for the names of old men with gray beards.

"Rap," it was not Tolstoy.

"He has a paint-brush in one hand, and something that looks like

a piece of white tape in the other hand," added the medium.

"Can it be Samuel Morse?" hazarded the inquirer.

"Rap-rap-rap!" It was Samuel Morse.

"If it's Samuel Morse," said Miss Dennick, who had said very little all evening, and had received slight attention from the occult oracles, "if it's Samuel Morse, he ought to be able to communicate with us by the code he invented, instead of by these round-about raps which other spirits have to use, knowing nothing of telegraphy."

"Probably not," said the medium quickly; "you know the spirits are tremendously inhibited, as Professor James calls it. They can manifest only in certain ways, and under the most favorable conditions."

"We might ask him, anyway," declared Thompson. Then, to the condescending Father of Telegraphy, who thus deigned to visit his humblest disciple, he addressed the question: "Will you answer in the Morse code?" And he had scarcely asked the question when "rap-rap-rap" it was answered in the affirmative.

"That would be a test of a conclusive nature," declared Mr. Sippit. "I felt it earlier in the evening that we should have some remarkable manifestation before the séance was over. I can see him nodding his head—isn't he, Mr. Congdon?"

"He is drawing back," was the medium's response; "he looks displeased."

"Raaap-rap-rap; raaap-rap-rap," came a distinct tattoo.

"D. D.," exclaimed Miss Dennick; "he is signaling."

"We are ready to receive any message," spoke Thompson in a solemn tone, addressing his words to the circumambient darkness. And almost at once there came a response:

"(- | . . . . | . | . — . | .) (. . | . . .) (. . . | — — — | — — | . | — — — | — . | .) (— . — — | — —— | . . —) (. — . . | — — — | . . . — | .)"

There was no mistaking the message. It was sent exactly as any telegraph operator in the real world would have sent it—a little more hesitantly perhaps, but there was no mistake about it. A cable had been laid across the river Styx.

"There is someone you love," was the import of the mystic raps.

"Can you tell me," inquired Harry Thompson, "whether this feeling is returned?"

"You would both be very happy," came the answer in dots and dashes, justifying the conjecture of the savants who have tried to

identify the spirit rappings of modern times with the ancient oracles.

"What are the initials of this somebody's name?"

"C. D."

"Why, those are my initials," coyly exclaimed Miss Dennick. "Mr. Morse is trying to tease me."

"You will make no mistake unless you delay," came the message tapped out by the venerable inventor in the shadow world. After that he could not be persuaded to make further communications.

"He is gone," the medium said faintly. "I am beginning to feel the strain."

"We have been sitting an hour and a half," added Sue; "we had better have a light."

When the light was turned on, the six people adjourned to the other room to discuss the marvelous experiences of the séance. Jim Congdon was warmly congratulated, especially by Mr. Sippit. "You are developing most decidedly. I felt the trumpet move several times. *They* were trying to pick it up. You ought to try materialization and slate-writing. That Morse manifestation was wonderful—decidedly. You ought to write it to the *Banner*."

After a cup of tepid iced tea, which Sue produced from her culinary realm, and which Mr. Sippit praised with paternal enthusiasm, the little company of psychic investigators dispersed. Harry Thompson accompanied Miss Dennick to her home. The clouds that had obscured the sky earlier in the evening had vanished. Above the trees of the park could be seen the old moon in the new moon's arms. A gentle breeze was stirring, and misty haloes of glory hovered around the electric lights. From a pianola somewhere came a spasmodic rendering of Moszkowski's *Serenade*, and the trolley cars punctuated their rising and falling drone with occasional clangs. It was a calm and tremulous night—a night to invite avowals and confessions.

Harry Thompson leaned over toward Miss Dennick and whispered: "What do you think of old Morse's idea?"

Clara Dennick made no answer.

"Don't you think," he continued in a wobbly tone, "that it's rather a good idea?"

"Oh, don't take old Morse too seriously."

"But I want you to take me seriously."

Again she made no answer.

"Will you?" he insisted.

There was a pause.

"Am I to understand that you are making me a proposal

of marriage?" Miss Dennick inquired with a gay little laugh.

"Yes," he fervently responded, "that's how I want you to understand it. I'm sure we should be just as happy as Morse said we would."

There was a silence, while his heart sank.

"Yes, I'm sure we would," she answered almost inaudibly.

He took her home by the longest way. They had much to say to each other. It was midnight when they reached the door. He said good-night twice. Then they heard a clock strike twelve, and the next time he said good-morning. He turned and walked five steps away—then he came back before she had closed the door.

"Clara," he called.

"Yes, Harry."

"I couldn't rest to-night if I didn't tell you this—no matter what you think of me for it."

"What is it?"

"The Morse manifestation—*I* produced it. I couldn't have said it in words. Can you forgive me?"

She laughed a blue-eyed, golden-haired laugh.

"I knew it all the time," she said.

The Wizard of Red Gulch.*

BY WILLIAM M. TISDALE.

ARTHUR ARMSTRONG, of San Francisco, was collector for the Golden Gate Iron Works, builders of stamp-mills and other heavy machinery. He was on his first trip into one of the interior counties of California, a mountainous, mining district, where the coaches of the Beaverville, Red Gulch and Gold Run Stage Company are still the only mediums of public conveyance. On this occasion Armstrong was the only passenger, for Joe Carter, the noted bandit, locally known as "The Holy Terror," had robbed the stage the day before, and the incident had caused a temporary decline in the traffic of the line. Even Wells, Fargo & Company had no treasure to forward that day, and therefore there was no shot-gun messenger aboard.

But the driver on the morning run, from the railway station into Beaverville, was a genial fellow, and, stimulated by a few draughts from Armstrong's capacious flask and by some of his choice cigars, gave a most entertaining sketch of the robbery of the day before. Stopping at the spot where it had taken place, he described its minutest details. He pointed out the tree under which the passengers had been "lined up," while Carter had picked their pockets. Carter's style, although peremptory, was very quiet, and he had treated the passengers with great consideration, apologizing for the annoying necessity of appropriating their valuables. The driver alone had made resistance, and had not been treated quite so gently. In fact, he had been "all shot up," and was now lying at Beaverville in a critical condition. His friends were in hot pursuit of Carter, intent upon lynching him if caught.

The road to Beaverville soon leaves the broad valleys that are traversed by the railroad and winds for a distance through the foothills. Thence it penetrates the Sierras, leading deeper and deeper into a rugged country with small and scattered settlements, most of which are mining camps. It goes up and down long declivities, some abrupt, some gently sloping. A part of the way is

* Copyright, 1898, by The Shortstory Publishing Company. Copyright secured in Great Britain. All rights reserved.

shaded by magnificent forests of pine and fir. The robbery had occurred not far from Beaverville, a rude wayside station, at which Armstrong and the driver arrived an hour or so after noon. Emerging fom the dining room after dinner, Armstrong found his friend, the driver, picking his teeth on the little veranda.

"I leave you here," the driver remarked.

"Sorry," said Armstrong; "I appreciated your company this morning. Who takes the reins?"

"Jim Willing, one of the best drivers on the road, and a jolly good fellow. You'll enjoy the afternoon."

When the team, six wiry broncos, was brought from the corral, Armstrong took his former seat on the box. "Good-by," he called to his late companion, reaching down a handful of cigars. "Have another?"

"Thanks. Good-by."

As the horses were attached, Armstrong heard one of the men say that there wasn't a fresh horse left, not even a saddle horse. Everything had been pressed into service in the pursuit of Carter, who had headed for Nevada. "All ready!" called the foreman of the corral force. "Where's Willing?"

Just then a man whom Armstrong had not noticed climbed quickly into the driver's seat. Without waiting to gather up the reins, which were fastened to the brake, he yelled, "Go!" in a voice like the crack of a pistol, and the horses started at a gallop, throwing aside the two men holding them. With a quick motion the driver loosened the brake and grasped the reins. As Armstrong turned to wave a farewell, he caught a fleeting glimpse of men excitedly running after them and shouting, "Whoa! Stop!" But the new driver urged the horses all the faster.

"Not much!" he said. "I don't stop for nobody. Let the duffer be on time if he wants to ride with me!" A turn in the road and the clump of pines quickly shut their pursuers out of sight, but Armstrong fancied that he still heard them shouting.

Greatly amused at the independence of the man who dared thus defy the manager of the line, by leaving a passenger behind, Armstrong took a good look at the new driver. He was tall, wiry, and muscular; dark, with a stubby black beard, apparently of only a few days' growth. His face had a peculiar pallor, and his eyes were luminous, like a cat's in the dark. His head wobbled queerly from side to side, and the edges of a livid wound, or a deep scar, near the right temple, protruded below the slouch hat that was pulled low on the forehead. Altogether, his appearance

was forbidding, even sinister, and Armstrong decided that his friend of the morning must have been joking when he predicted a pleasant afternoon. The new driver seemed anything but sociable. To the proffer of the flask, refilled at the station, he answered:

"No, thank you; not to-day."

"Have a cigar, then?"

"Thanks, but I don't care to smoke."

Armstrong lit a cigar and puffed in silence. The driver gave his whole attention to his horses, guiding them with wonderful skill. The road was now taking them through a deep cañon, with a stream rushing down its centre. There were many quick descents and sudden turns, but the driver made them all with the greatest ease, and pace never slacking. Armstrong noticed, with a curious thrill of mingled apprehension and pleasurable excitement, that he took every possible chance of an accident, yet always escaped. At the curves, he drew his horses in as closely as possible to the overhanging rocks, and sometimes the coach swung for a moment on two wheels, but it always righted itself, and the horses seemed to understand the slightest motion of the guiding hand.

Passing out of the cañon, they came to a stretch of more level country, and Armstrong improved the relatively slower gait by another attempt at conversation.

"How far," he asked, "to the next station?"

"'Bout twenty mile."

"Be there in two hours?"

"Certain; less than thet if we hev any luck. Them hosses is good fer fourteen mile an hour, an' the road's down hill 'most all the way now."

"I suppose you have all about the hold-up yesterday?"

"Certain. I wuz thar."

"What?"

"I wuz thar. Saw the hull shootin' match."

Armstrong thought that the fellow was lying, but he didn't like to say so. He lit another cigar and continued:

"Were you one of the passengers yesterday?"

"No."

"You surely weren't the driver? He got shot."

"No. I wuzn't the driver."

"Nor the express messenger?"

"No."

"Well, then, if you were not the driver, nor the express

messenger, nor a passenger, what were you doing there?"

"Jest loafin' 'round as a spectator."

More puzzled than ever, Armstrong inquired, "How did you happen to be ther?"

"Never you mind, stranger. Don't be too inquirin' 'bout other people's bizness. When I tell you I wuz there, that orter settle it."

Armstrong was hurt, not so much at his companion's gruffness, as at the fact that the genial driver of the morning had so grossly deceived him. Either this was true or else he was singularly unsuccessful in finding the right side of the rough nature with which he was trying to establish an acquaintance. He made one further effort.

"Now see here, Willing,—" he commenced.

"You're mistaken," the driver interrupted. "My name ain't Willing."

"The deuce you say!" Who the devil are you, then?"

"They call me the Wizard of Red Gulch, but my real name is William Murphy," said the driver quietly.

Armstrong sulked back in his seat, and in gloomy silence awaited further developments. These were soon forthcoming. They commenced to wind about the brow of a mountain preparatory to a descent on the other side of a "divide." There was forest on both sides of the road, and now and then they skirted the edges of ravines.

"I'll tell you how I got my name," said the driver, still in a quiet, monotonous tone. "I kin do things with hosses an' coaches sech ez no other feller ever done. I'll soon show you my greatest act. Jest over the hill here we go down all the way fer 'bout a mile. Pretty steep, too. They call it Long Cañon. 'Bout the middle there's a stretch of a quarter of a mile where the bluff on this side is straight down five hundred to a thousand feet. Narrow road. Jest 'bout the middle of this there's a big boulder right on the ragged edge. I turns them hosses loose an' makes it at a gallop. Ev'ry trace on this side an' both wheels hez to graze thet rock 'thout hittin' hard enough to throw us over. See?"

No, Armstrong didn't see, and didn't want to see. He was convinced now that he was traveling with a maniac. But it was too late to interfere. They had entered upon the narrow road indicated, with a sheer wall of granite at their left, and a plunge into unknown depths at their right. Armstrong caught glimpses of the tops of trees far below them, and fancied that he heard the roaring of a torrent at the bottom. He shut his eyes in despair; then opened

them again, impelled by a horrible fascination. Yes, there was the boulder just ahead. The brake was jammed down hard but the horses were plunging merrily along, their heads in the air, their hoofs flying, quivering with excitement. The coach swayed and lurched, and the man who held the reins, his eyes fixed intently on the leaders, leaning away forward in his seat, was calling, with explosive emphasis, which seemed to lift the bronchos into the air: "Go! *Vamos! Vamos!* Git out o' here."

They swept past the boulder. Armstrong saw the traces touch and bound away and heard the hubs of the wheels grate against it. A few moments later the danger was past. The horses had swung around a turn in the road and were trotting quietly upon a space that was more nearly level. Armstrong wiped the sweat from his face. A little later they emerged from the cañon and the view widened on either hand. Armstrong breathed more freely.

"I knowed I could do it ag'in," said the driver quietly. "I done it ev'ry day fer three year—except oncet."

"What happened that time?" Armstrong stammered, with a desperate effort at unconcern.

The driver ignored the question. "Would you mind holdin' the ribbons a minit?" he inquired. "I git off here."

Mechanically, Armstrong took the reins. Without an instant's hesitation, the Wizard of Red Gulch stepped lightly from the swiftly moving coach and waved a farewell to Armstrong, who looked back at him, bewildered. He had expected to see Murphy roll head over heels and stop with a broken neck. But nothing of the kind occurred. Murphy stood for a moment with his tall figure sharply outlined in the glare of the dusty road-bed, a melancholy smile playing upon his cadaverous features. Then he vanished, all in an instant, and Armstrong thought that he must have plunged into the chaparral by the side of the road. He was uncertain whether he ought to stop. He had never driven a six-horse team in his life, and he hesitated a moment between desire to be rid of the maniac and reluctance to assume responsibility. A second later the horses settled the question, for they broke into a gallop again, and Armstrong found himself occupied keeping them in the road. For the first time he fully appreciated the wonderful skill of his recent traveling companion.

Having gained a certain control, Armstrong kept the horses moving along and left the Wizard to his fate. He soon entered a better country, where there were ranches of some pretensions and

evidences of prosperity, and was congratulating himself that he must be nearing Red Gulch, when he noticed a dozen horsemen coming swiftly towards him. At sight of the coach they separated, ranging themselves on either side of the road. When Armstrong came up they pointed rifles at his head and ordered him to halt. He brought the six horses to a stop as quickly as he could. "Throw up your hands!" was the next command. Armstrong lost no time in complying. His captors were roughly clad, uncouth, but ready men of the mountains—not at all the sort to be trifled with. They surrounded the coach, swearing, laughing, cracking frontier jokes.

"Git up thar, Jim, an' hang on to them bronchos," said a burly fellow, evidently the leader. "Jim" slipped from his horse, handed the bridle to the man next in line, mounted the box, and picked up the reins which Armstrong had dropped.

"Now then, Sandy an' Tom, git up thar, too, an' search him fer weapons." Two others climbed upon the stage. After a hasty examination of Armstrong's clothing, they reported that there were no "shooting irons" upon him.

"The hell you say!" remarked the leader in a puzzled tone.

"Gentlemen," said Armstrong, "may I inquire the reason for this outrage?"

"Now don't try to run no bluff on us, young man," was the reply. "We're out after ye, and we've got ye. We're agoin' to take yer inter Red Gulch, where ye'll have a fair trial. Fall in, boys. Go ahead, Jim."

Escorted by the riders and closely watched by the men with him on the stage, Armstrong made his entry into Red Gulch an hour after his sudden deposition from the proud position of driver. On the way he gathered little information, every question being met with ridicule or with indifference. He inferred, however, from the little that was said, that he was accused of stealing the horses and the stage, and was supposed to be connected, in some mysterious way, with Joe Carter.

Red Gulch is a straggling mining village. The office of the stage company is flanked on one side by the post-office and general store, and on the other by the Blue Blood saloon. As the stage and its cavalry escort came swinging down the single narrow street of the place, thirty or forty men and half-grown boys rushed forward and surrounded them. Several were armed, with revolvers ostentatiously protruding from pockets and belts. Their air of eager expectancy impressed Armstrong forcibly rather than pleasantly. At a word from Jim, when the stage stopped, he

stepped to the ground. The crowd laughed and drew closer. A tall, old man, with long gray beard, a hooked nose, and an eye like a hawk's, waved them aside.

"Jedge," said the leader of the capturing party, "here's your man. We told ye thet we'd bring him in, dead of alive. He's a queer cuss. Didn't show a bit of fight. Consequently he's here to speak fer himself. We've searched him. We didn't find nothin' in the way of tools—no rifle, no revolver, not even a knife. He didn't look like one of Carter's gang. But we'll turn him over to you fellers, an' you can try him. We've done our part. Now you do yourn. In my opinion, though, he ain't worth the price of a rope to hang him with. I think he's locoed."

With a look of infinite disgust and a wave of the hand which signified that he was done with the business, Armstrong's captor delivered him into the custody of the law, as represented by Judge Billings, of Red Gulch. Something in Armstrong's appearance seemed to strike the judge as irresistibly comical, and he joined in the laughter of the crowd as he laid a sinewy hand, at the end of a long, lean arm, lightly upon Armstrong's shoulder.

"So you're the bold, bad man," he said, "thet runs off with a stage an' six hosses, be you?"

"I don't understand you, sir. There must be some mistake," Armstrong replied with dignity, and shaking off the detaining arm.

"Wa'al, they telephoned from Beaverville to look out fer a light-haired, doodish duffer who hed run off with the coach, an' here you be, answerin' the description all right."

"Did they also telephone that they sent the stage out with a lunatic for a driver?" Armstrong demanded angrily.

"No—o. They didn't say that. But mebbe thet's right boys, what d'ye say?"

"Looks like thet wuz 'bout right," said one.

"Let's try him for hoss stealing, anyway," said another.

"Ask him where his friend Carter, is," suggested a third.

"Gentlemen," said Armstrong, "you are evidently laboring under a misapprehension. If you will devote a moment's reflection to this subject, you will at once see that I could have no possible use for a coach and six horses. I have not been guilty of larceny, as you appear to surmise. I simply took the reins from the hands of a crazy driver, who deserted me several miles back, and I have brought the property of the Beaverville, Red Gulch and Gold Run Stage Company to the place where it belongs. It

is I who have suffered, not you or the company. I have been frightened out of my wits this afternoon, and, if you will give me your attention for a few minutes, I will prove to you that your suspicions in regard to me are entirely unfounded."

Thereupon, Armstrong related the story of his ride. When he described the Wizard and his reckless driving, the crowd laughed uproariously. They tossed their hats in the air and yelled like madmen. Armstrong became convinced that most of them were drunk. No one could tell what freak would seize them next. He was frightened. His voice faltered; his knees shook; but he managed to carry his narrative to the end, realizing, as he told how the Wizard had dropped off from the stage and vanished—he did not know whither—that his auditors had a reasonable foundation for their mirthful incredulity.

"You're a good one," Judge Billings remarked, when Armstrong had finished. "Well, boys," he continued, "come along an' let's talk it over. We'll settle this thing right now."

The crowd drew a little apart, and, left alone, Armstrong took a seat on the steps of the shanty that served for a stage office. He caught snatches of the comments passed upon him during the animated discussion which followed. They were such as these:

"Slickest liar ever been in these parts."

Queer lookin' duck, but don't look like a hoss thief."

"You bet he's ez crazy ez a loon."

While this proceeding was in progress, six fresh horses had been attached to the stage, and a new driver, a ruddy, cheerful individual, was drawing the reins over them for another start. Armstrong did not stir. He thought it better to wait until he was given permission. The driver called "All aboard!" Judge Billings came back to Armstrong.

"The boys," he said, "hez found ye guilty ez charged, but with extenooatin' circumstances. I hope you'll excuse th' informality of the perceedin's. I'm a jestice of the peace, but in these parts the wheels of jestice is mostly greased by public opinion. Some of our most influential citizens air out after Carter. Mebbe that's jest ez well fer you. If the boys thet's here don't object, I kin let ye go. Some of them thinks you're in cahoots with Carter, but they ain't proved it. We've decided to turn you loose if you'll stan' treat all 'round."

Without stopping to discuss the equity of this decision, Armstrong willingly acquiesced. Everybody filed into the Blue Blood saloon, and Armstrong paid for drinks for all. Then he climbed